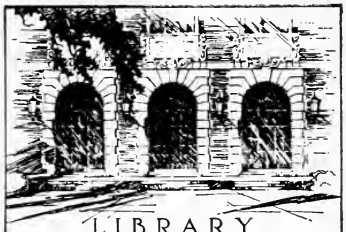
Katherine A. E. Watson



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THE RED COURT FARM.

VOL. I.

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THE

RED COURT FARM.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

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K. A. Watson
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NOTE.

THE germ of this novel appeared in two short tales published by the author in first-class periodicals some years ago.

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F. M. E. Wilson.

THE RED COURT FARM.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

On a certain portion of the English coast, lying sufficiently convenient to that of France to have given rise to whispers of smuggling in the days gone by, there is a bleak plateau of land, rising high above the sea. It is a venturesome feat to walk close to its edge and gaze down the perpendicular cliffs to the beach below—enough to make a strong man dizzy. A small beach just there, called the Halfmoon from its shape, nearly closed in by the projecting rocks, and accessible only from the sea at high water; at low water a very narrow path leads from it round the left projection of rock. It was a peculiar place altogether, this spot; and it is necessary to make it pretty clear to the imagination of those who read

the story connected with it. The Halfmoon itself was never under water, for the tide did not reach it, but the narrow path winding round to the left *was;* and that rendered the half-circular beach unapproachable by land at intervals in the four-and-twenty hours. A few rude steps shelved down from this Halfmoon to a small strip of lower beach underneath, whose ends were lost in the sea. The projecting rocks on either side, forming as may be said the corners of the Halfmoon, went right into the sea. Those on your right hand (standing face to the sea) cut off all communication with the shore beyond, for a depth of water touched them always. Those on the left extended less far out, and the narrow path winding round them was dry when the tide was down. It thus arose that the Halfmoon could be gained by this one narrow path only, or by a boat from the sea.

For all practical purposes it might just as well have been unattainable. Not once in a month—nay, it might be said, not once in twelve months—would any human being stray thither. Not only was there no end to be answered in going to it, but the place was said to be haunted; and the simple villagers around would sooner have spent

the night watching in the church's vaults than have ventured to the Halfmoon beach between sundown and cockcrow. The most superstitious race of men on the earth's surface are sailors; and fishermen partake of the peculiarity.

Turning round on the plateau now—it is called the plateau just as the beach below is called the Halfmoon—with our backs to the sea, we look inland. It is only the plateau that is high; the coast itself and the lands around lie rather low. On the left hand (remember that our hands have been reversed) a long line of dreary coast stretches onwards, not a habitation to be seen; on the right lies the village—Coastdown. Fishermen's huts are built on the side and top of the cliffs, not there so perpendicular; small cottages dot the low-lying grass lands; and an opening in the one poor street (if it can be called such) of the village, shows the real useable beach and the few fishing craft moored to it.

Standing still on the plateau, our backs to the sea, the eye falls on a landscape of cultivated plains, extending out for miles and miles. The only house near to the plateau is exactly opposite to it—a large red-brick house built in a dell. It may be a quarter of a mile distant from the edge

of the plateau where we stand, but the gradual descent of the grassy land causes it to look very much nearer. This is the Red Court Farm. It is a low, long house, rather than a high one, and has been built on the site of an ancient castle, signs of whose ruins may be seen still. The plateau itself is but as wide as about a good stone's throw; and on its lower part, not far from where it joins the lands of the Red Court Farm, and the descent is rather abrupt, rises a dilapidated circular stone wall, breast high, with a narrow opening where the door used to be. This is called the Round Tower, and is supposed to have been the watch-tower of the castle.

The Red Court stands alone, the last house of the colony, some distance removed from any; its gates and door of entrance are at the end of the house, looking to the village. The nearest building to it is the small old church, St. Peter's, standing in the midst of a large graveyard dotted with graves; with its portico-entrance, and its square belfry, grey with age, green with patches of moss. The high road, advancing from the open country behind—it's hard to say whence, or from what bustling cities—comes winding by the entrance gates of the Red Court Farm with a

sharp turn, and sees two roads branching off before it. It takes the one to the right, bearing round to the village, passes through it, and goes careering on to Jutpoint, a small town, some four or five miles distant, having the sea on the right all the way. The other branching road leads past the church to the heath, or common, on which are situated the handful of houses, all of moderate size, inhabited by the gentry of the place.

The only good house was the Red Court Farm. Thornycroft was the name of the family living in it. Mr. Thornycroft owned the Red Court and some of the land around it; and he rented more, which he farmed. Many years ago a gentleman had come down to look at the place, which was for sale, and bought it. He was named Thornycroft. His two sons, Richard and Harry, were fine powerful young men, but wild in their habits, and caused some scandal in the quiet place. Previous to the purchase, the house had been known as the Red Court, it was supposed from the deep red of the bricks of which it was built. Mr. Thornycroft at once added on the word "Farm"—the Red Court Farm. A right good farmer he proved himself to be, the extent of the land being about three hundred acres,

comprising what he rented. Within a very few years of the purchase Mr. Thornycroft died, and Richard, the eldest son, came into possession. In the following year Richard also died, from the effects of an accident in France. Both the brothers were fond of taking continental trips, Richard especially.

Thus the place came into the hands of Harry Thornycroft, and he entered upon it with his wife and little son. His ostensible residence since his marriage had been in London; but he had stayed a great deal at the Red Court Farm. A second son was soon after born, and some five or six years later another boy and a girl. Mrs. Thornycroft, a gentle, ladylike, delicate woman, did not enjoy robust health. Something in her face and manner seemed to give the idea that she had an inward care—that skeleton in the closet from which so few of us are quite free. Whether it was so or not in her case none could tell. That Harry Thornycroft made her a fond and indulgent husband—that they were much attached to each other—there could be no doubt of. Her look of care may have arisen solely from her state of health; perhaps from the secret conviction that she should be called away early

from her children. Years before she died Coastdown said she was fading away. Fade away she did, without any very tangible disorder, and was laid to rest in a corner of the churchyard. To those who know where to look for it, her large white tombstone may be distinguished from our standing-place on the plateau. That grief had been long over, and the Red Court itself again.

Mr. Thornycroft was a county magistrate, and rode in to Jutpoint, when the whim took him, and sat upon the bench there. There was no bench at Coastdown; but petty offenders were brought before him at the Red Court—partly because he was the only gentleman in the commission of the peace living at Coastdown, partly from the fact that he was more wealthy and influential than all the other residents put together. A lenient justice was he, never convicting when he could spare: many a fine, that he himself had imposed from the bench at Jutpoint, was mysteriously conveyed out of his pocket into the poor offender's to save the man from prison. To say that Justice Thornycroft—the title generally accorded him—was beloved in Coastdown, would be a poor word to define the feeling of the poorer people around. He had a liberal hand,

an open heart; and no person carried a tale of trouble to him in vain. His great fault, said the small gentry around, was unreasonable liberality. Never was there a pleasanter companion than he, and his brother magistrates chuckled when they got an invitation to the Red Court dinners, for they loved the hearty welcome and the jolly cheer.

The two elder sons, Richard and Isaac, were fine towering men like himself—rather wild both, just what Harry Thornycroft and his elder brother had been in their young days. Richard was dark, stern, and resolute; but he would unbend to courtesy over his wine when guests were at table. The few who remembered the dead elder brother said Richard resembled him much more than he did his father, as is sometimes seen to be the case. Certainly in countenance Richard was not like the justice. Isaac was. It was his father's fair and handsome face over again, with its fine features, its dark-blue eyes, and its profusion of light curling hair. There was altogether a great charm in Isaac Thornycroft. His manners were winning; his form, strong and tall as Richard's, had a nameless grace and ease that Richard's lacked; and his heart and hand were

open as his father's. The young one, Cyril, was less robust than his brothers—quiet, gentle, very much like his dead mother. Cyril's taste was all for books; to the out-of-door life favoured by Richard and Isaac he had never been given. Richard called him a "milksop;" Isaac would pet him almost as he might a girl; all indulged him. To Richard and Isaac no profession was given; as yet none was talked of for Cyril. The two elder occupied themselves on the land—ostensibly, at any rate; but half their time was spent in shooting, fishing, hunting, according to the seasons. "A thriving farm the Red Court must be," quoth the neighbours given to gossip, "for the old man to keep all his sons to it." But it was well known that Mr. Thornycroft must possess considerable private property; the style of living would alone prove that.

A broad gravel drive led straight from the gates to the entrance door. There were different gates and entrances at the back of the house, serving for farm vehicles, for servants, and for people on business generally. The kitchens and other domestic apartments were at the back, looking on to the various buildings behind—barns, stables, and such like. The further end

of the stables joined some of the old ruins still standing—in fact, it may be said that part of the ruins were used as such. The young men kept their dog-cart there—a large, stylish affair, capable of containing no end of dogs—and the fleet, strong, fine horse that usually drew it. The front of the house (as already seen) faced the plateau and the sea—a wide handsome frontage enclosing handsome rooms. And it is quite time we entered them.

Through the portico, level with the ground, and up the two steps into the long but somewhat narrow hall—very narrow at the back, and shut in by a door—doors opened on either side it. The first room on the right was the dining-room—a spacious apartment, warm and comfortable, bright pictures on its dark wainscoted walls, a rich Turkey carpet giving luxury to the tread. The windows were at the end, looking towards the village and the church belfry; and the fireplace was opposite the door. Passing up the hall, the next room was called familiarly the justice-room. Here Mr. Thornycroft sat when offenders were brought before him, and here he saw his farming people and kept his papers. Beyond this was the staircase, and a door, still

on the right, opening on the passage leading to the domestic apartments. On the left-hand side of the entrance-hall was the large drawing-room, its windows facing the front; beyond it a smaller and plainer one, always in use. A snug little parlour adjoined this, in which Miss Thornycroft took her lessons: all these three faced the front. The door at the back of the hall opened on a passage and to some rooms used only by the gentlemen. The passage ran through to a side entrance, which was just opposite that portion of the stables built on the old ruins—this was convenient, since the young men, who had a habit of coming in at all hours of the day and night, could put up their horse and dog-cart and let themselves in with their latch-keys without sound or movement penetrating to the family and household.

It is with the study, or Miss Thornycroft's parlour, that we have to do to-day. Its window is thrown open to the hot July sun—to the green lawn and the shrubs underneath—to the bare plateau beyond, on whose edge a coast-guardsman was pacing on duty—to the sparkling sea in the distance. The paper of the room was of white and gold, pretty drawings and land-

scapes in water-colours adorning it. Some of them had been done by Miss Thornycroft, some by her late mother. The carpet and chairs were green; the piano, cabinets, and other furniture were handsome; the white curtains waved in the gentle breeze—altogether it was a room pleasant to look upon.

Seated on the music-stool, her face to the door, was a little middle-aged, brown woman, unmistakably French, without her tongue, which was going fluently, a look of reproach on her naturally placid face. It was Mademoiselle Derode, the governess, resident now some five years at the Red Court. A simple-minded woman, accomplished though she was—good as gold, and timid as her own nature. Richard Thornycroft had related to her some of the ghostly tales connected with the Red Court—or rather with its immediate environs—and she would not have stirred out at night alone for the world. Her chamber window when she first came faced the plateau; after hearing the stories she begged and prayed to be removed into another. Mrs. Thornycroft, alive then, complied with a sad smile, and reproved Richard in her gentle manner for saying anything. If whispers

were to be believed, these same ghostly rumours were even then helping to kill Mrs. Thornycroft.

Mademoiselle Derode was *en colère* this morning with her pupil. French, German, English; good music, harp, and piano; drawing and painting; she was thoroughly versed in all, and had as thoroughly taught. For her age, Miss Thornycroft was an exceedingly well-educated girl, but apt at times to be a rebellious one. In fact she was growing quite beyond the control of the little governess.

The young lady stood by the table facing the window—a tall, very handsome girl of nearly sixteen, with her brother Isaac's fair skin and bright features, and a suspicious look of Richard's resolute lip. She wore a blue muslin dress, blue ribbons in her fair hair; her pretty hands were tossing, not in play but petulance, a large white rose, broken short off from its stalk; her well-shaped head was thrown back; her light clear blue eyes looked out defiantly.

"As if there could be reason in it!" spoke mademoiselle in her quaint but well-pronounced English. "You did but the little half of your lessons yesterday; the other day before it you went out without saying to me the one word;

and now this morning you want to go out again. You will not do any one little thing! I say, Miss Mary Anne, that it has not reason in it."

"I promised Captain Copp I would go, mademoiselle. Mrs. Copp will be waiting for me."

"And I promise you that you cannot go," returned the governess, decisively. "My faith! you go, you go, you go; yesterday, to-day, to-morrow; and where are your studies? I might as well take my departure; I am of no longer use."

"I wish I was that douanier," spoke the young lady with an angry stamp, looking out at the preventive man pacing the edge of the plateau.

"I wish you were—for one day; you would soon wish yourself back again into yourself, Miss Thornycroft. Will you sit down and begin your studies?"

"No; it is too hot to work. German would give me the headache to-day, mademoiselle."

"I wish your papa, Monsieur the Justice was at home. I would appeal to him."

"So would I. I wish he was! Papa would not make me do lessons against my will."

"Will you come into the other room to your harp, then?"

"No," reiterated Miss Thornycroft. "When I don't want to work, I can't work; and, excuse me, mademoiselle, but I *won't*. There! I am invited out to-day, and I want to go. Mrs. Sam Copp is going to Jutpoint, and she is to take me."

Mademoiselle got up in despair. Day by day, she saw it well, her authority was getting less.

"Miss Mary Anne, hear me! *I will not have you go.* I defend you to quit the house."

Mary Anne laughed disobediently.

"I shall go if Captain Copp comes for me, mademoiselle."

Mademoiselle wrung her hands.

"I will go and find Mr. Richard. He is master here when the justice is not. I will lay the case before him and say, 'What am I to do with this rebellious child?'"

She quitted the room on her search. Miss Thornycroft went to the window and leaned out, wishing herself once more the preventive man, or anybody else who had not a governess. At that moment she saw her brother Isaac go running on to the plateau from the direction of the village, stand a minute talking with the coastguardsman,

and then come vaulting down towards the house. It has not been mentioned that a line of light railings enclosed the plateau below the round tower—a boundary line between it and the Red Court grounds. Isaac Thornycroft leaped the railings, and saw his sister. She called to him in a voice of earnestness; he came round to the front entrance and entered the room.

Handsome in his careless grace, and bright as the summer's morning. He wore light cool clothes, his linen was curiously white and fine; looking altogether, as he always did, a noble gentleman. Richard would be in coarse things, unbrushed and shabby, for a week together; the brothers had quite opposite instincts.

Mary Anne went up to him with a pleading voice and tears in her eyes, all her assumption of will gone.

"Oh, Isaac!—dear Isaac! won't you help me? You are always kind."

"My little dove! what is it?"

She told her tale. Her engagement with Captain and Mrs. Copp, and mademoiselle's cruel hard-heartedness. Isaac laughed outright.

"Cruel hardheartedness, indeed! worse than that of Barbara Allen. My pretty one!" he

whispered, stooping until his lips touched her cheek.

"Well, Isaac?"

"Put on your things, and I'll smuggle you off. Quick."

She needed no second warning. In two minutes, down she was again, a white mantle on her shoulders, a straw hat with its blue ribbons shading her fair bright face. Isaac took her out at the front door, just before Mademoiselle Derode got back again.

"I have sent for your brother, Mr. Richard, Miss Mary Anne, and —— *Elle n'est pas ici?*"

Mademoiselle called, and looked in this room and that. She had not finished when Richard strode in, his face dark and stern as usual, his shoes and gaiters dusty, his velveteen waistcoat buttoned close up, his coat soiled. He had been helping to fill in a pond.

"Lessons! of course she must learn her lessons. Where is she, mademoiselle?"

Mademoiselle was arriving at the conclusion that she was nowhere. One of the housemaids had seen her dress herself, and go downstairs. Of course she had gone. Gone in disobedience!

Richard went back to his pond, and mademoiselle sat down and folded her arms.

In the course of an hour Mr. Thornycroft came in. A handsome man still, upright and grand; his features fair and pleasant, his smile rather free, no grey as yet mingling with his still luxuriant hair. Mademoiselle carried her grievance to him; as she had been obliged to do more than once of late.

"It is not to complain of her, monsieur; I'm sure you know that, I love her too well; but in her own interest I must speak. She is at the age when she most needs guidance and control; and she is showing that she has a will of her own, and will exercise it! It was always there."

"I suppose it was," said the justice. "I have a will myself. Richard and Isaac have wills."

"If I can no longer be obeyed, monsieur, better that I should go back to my little home in France, and make a place for a governess who will have control."

"No, no," said Mr. Thornycroft, very quickly. "That would not do. I'll have no fresh governess here."

"But what is to be done, monsieur?"

"I'll think of it," said Mr. Thornycroft.

CHAPTER II.

ROBERT HUNTER AND HIS WIFE.

In the midst of the pretty and exclusive village of Katterley, an inland spot, from twenty to thirty miles away from the sea, there stands a charming residence, half-cottage, half-villa, called Katterley Lodge. Its rooms are warm in winter, cool in summer; it rises in the midst of a lovely garden, in view of magnificent scenery; and the sweetest roses and honeysuckles entwine themselves on its walls.

The evening August sun—July had just past—shone full on its entrance gate; on a lady, young and fair, who was leaning over it. She may have been about three-and-twenty, and she was dressed in white, with ribbons in her hair. There was a remarkable refinement and delicacy in her face, her manners, in her appearance altogether; and her soft dark eyes had a sad expression. Did you, who may be reading this, ever observe

that peculiar, sad look—not a passing sadness, or one caused by present care—but a fixed mournful look, implanted in the eyes by nature? It is not a common expression, or one often seen; rely upon it, when you do see it, it is but an index that the spirit is, or will be, sad within.

Sauntering up the road towards the gate, encumbered with a basket, a rod, and other apparatus pertaining to the fishing art, strode a gentleman, carelessly switching the hedge as he passed it. No sad expression was there about him; rather the contrary. He was of middle height, very slender, with a frank pleasant face given to laughing, and dark auburn hair; his manner was light, his speech free and careless. Her face sparkled at his approach, and she opened the gate long before he had gained it.

"What sport, Robert? What have you brought?"

"Brought you myself," was the gentleman's reply, as he passed in at the gate she held wide. "Thank you. How much is the toll?"

As he bent to take the "toll," a kiss, she glanced shyly in his face and blushed—blushed brightly; although she was his wife of nearly

three years' standing. In a retiring, impassioned earnest nature such as hers, it takes a great deal ere love can die out—a convulsion sometimes. With her it had not begun to die.

His name was Robert Frederick Hunter. His wife liked the second name best, and generally called him by it, but as other people adhered to the first it may be best to do so here. His career already, young though he was, had seen changes. Reared in middle-class life in the North of England, practically educated, rather than fashionably, he had served his articles to a civil engineer. Ere they were quite out, and he free, a small fortune came to him through a relative. Mr. Robert Hunter thought he could not do better than take to a red-coat, and he purchased a lieutenancy in a home corps. Nearly simultaneously with this, he met with Clara Lake, of Katterley. He fell in love with her; at least he fancied so; she most unmistakably did with him, and the preliminaries for a marriage were arranged. Her father made it a proviso that he should quit the army; and that they should live with him after the marriage at Katterley Lodge. Robert Hunter assented, sold out, and the

marriage took place. When his wife's father died shortly after, it was found that Katterley Lodge and money amounting to four or five hundred a year were left to her, with a condition that Mr. Hunter should take the name of Lake. So he was mostly called in Katterley, Lake, or Hunter-Lake; elsewhere he was as before Hunter. Just for the present we will call him Lake, but it must not be forgotten that Hunter was his real name.

Mr. Lake opened his basket as he got in and displayed the contents—some fine trout. Two were ordered to be dressed, and served with the tea. On the days of these fishing expeditions, Mrs. Lake dined early. Occasionally she went with him. Not very often. The sport wearied her, and but for him at whose side she sat, it would never have been endurable. "Sport, indeed!" she used laughingly to say, "I'd as soon be at a funeral."

"What have you been doing all the afternoon, Clara?"

"Oh, reading and working; and wishing it was time for you to come home."

"Silly girl!" laughed he, as he played with her curls. "Suppose I should be brought home

to you some day fished out of the stream myself; drowned and dead."

"Don't joke, please," was her reply, given in a low voice.

"It had like to have been no joke this afternoon. I all but over-balanced myself. But for a friendly tree I should have been in; perhaps done for."

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed, the bright rose fading out of her cheeks.

"And there's a fierce bit of current there, and the river is at its deepest, and the mill-wheel a stone's throw lower down," he continued, as if he enjoyed the sport of teasing her; which perhaps he did. "I was an idiot never to learn to swim."

"Did you slip?" she asked in a half-whisper.

"No; I was leaning too forward and lost my balance. Oh, Clary! you are a little coward at best. Why your heart is beating fast; a vast deal faster than mine did, I can tell you. And where have your roses gone?"

She looked up with a faint smile.

To be affected in this manner, to agitation, merely at the recital of the possible danger, now past, was what Mr. Lake did not understand.

Neither did he understand the depth of her love, for no sentiment in his own heart echoed to it; the time for love, with him, had not come.

"It is simply foolish, child, to feel alarm now," he said, looking at her gravely.

"You must not go again, Robert."

The remark called forth a hearty laugh. "Not go again! What am I to do, then, until shooting comes in?"

What, indeed? Robert Lake was an idle man. One of those whose unhappy lot it is (the most unhappy lot on earth) to be obliged to "kill" time, or else find it hang on their hands with a heavy weight. To a man born to idleness, cradled in the lap of luxury, it is bad enough; but to Robert Lake, brought up to industry, it was simply unbearable. He was skilled and clever in his profession, and he loved it; the misfortune of his life was having the money left to him; the great mistake his quitting his profession. He saw it now; he had seen it nearly ever since. Another mistake, but a smaller one, was his retiring from the army; as he had entered it, he ought to have kept in it. That fault was not his, but old Mr. Lake's. Lieutenant Hunter was on a visit at his sister's when

he met Clara Lake, also staying there, the heiress in a small way. They fell in love with each other; he, after his temperament, carelessly and lightly, a species of love that he had felt for others, and would feel for more; she with all the fervour, the lasting depth of an impassioned and poetic nature. When he came to speak of marriage, and the father—an old-fashioned man who had once worn a pig-tail—said "Yes, upon condition that you quit soldiering and settle down with me—I cannot part with my daughter," Robert Hunter acquiesced without a word of murmur. Nay, he rather liked the prospect; change of all sorts bears its charm of magic for the young. And he was very young; but a year or so older than his wife. They settled down in Katterley Lodge; he to idleness, and it brings danger sometimes; she to happiness, which she believed in as real, as a bliss that would last for ever. If there were a man more perfect than other men on earth, she believed her husband to be that man. A charming confidence, a safeguard for a wife's heart; but sometimes the trust gets rudely awakened. One great grief had come to Clara Lake—she lost her baby; but she was getting over that now.

How intolerable idleness had been to Robert Hunter at first, none save himself ever knew. Over and over again visions of resuming his work as a civil engineer, came pressing on him. But it was never done. In the first year of their marriage came old Mr. Lake's long illness and death; in the second year came the baby and a prolonged illness for Clara; in the third year, this, the idleness had grown upon him, and he cared less to exchange it for hard work. It is of all evils nearly the most insidious.

All the year long, from January to December, living at Katterley Lodge with nothing to do! And he was really beginning not to feel the sameness. Their income, about six hundred a year in all, was not sufficient to allow of their mixing in the great world's fair, the London season; and one visit only had they paid the sea-side. The pretty cottage, with its roses and its honeysuckles for a bower, and fishing for recreation in the summer season! It had a monotonous charm, no doubt; but the young man's conscience sometimes warned him that he was wasting his life.

The tea and the fish came in, and they sat down to it, Mrs. Lake remarking that she

had forgotten to mention his sister had been there.

"What has she come over for?"

"To see the Jupps. Some little matter of business, she said."

"Business with the Jupps! Gossiping, rather, Clary."

"She said she should remain to tea with them. I wanted her to come back and take it with us; I told her there would be some fish. The fish was a great temptation, she said, but she must stay at the Jupps'! Who's this?" continued Mrs. Lake as the gate was pushed open with a hasty hand. "Why, here she is!"

"And now for a clatter." He alluded to his sister's voluble tongue, but he got up and went out to greet her, table-napkin in hand. It was Mrs. Chester, his half-sister. She was ten years older than he, twenty times older in experience, and rather inclined to be dictatorial to him and his gentle wife. Her husband, a clergyman, had died a few months back, and she was not left well-off in the world. She had just taken a house at Guild, a place about seven miles from Katterley; though how she meant to pay expenses in it, she scarcely knew.

"Well, Clara! here I am back again!" she exclaimed as she came in; "like a piece of bad money returned."

"I am so glad to see you!" returned Mrs. Lake, in her warmth of courtesy, as she rose and brought forward a chair and rang the bell, and busied herself with other little signs of welcome.

Mrs. Chester threw off her widow's bonnet and black silk mantle. Her well-formed face was pale in general, but the hot August sun made it red now. She was a little, restless woman, inclined to be stout, with shrewd grey eyes and brown hair, and a nose sharp at the end. The deep crape on her merino gown looked worn and shabby; her muslin collar and cuffs were tumbled. She told everybody she was twenty-eight; Mr. Lake knew her to be four-and-thirty.

"Such a mess it makes of one, travelling in this heat and dust!" she exclaimed rather fretfully, as she shook out her skirts and pulled her collar here and there before the chimney-glass. "I've nothing but my bonnet-cap here; you won't mind it."

It was a bit of plain muslin with a widow's gauffered border. Mrs. Chester untied the black

strings of it as she turned round and fanned herself with her handkerchief.

"Did the fish bring you back, Penelope?" asked Mr. Lake.

"Not it. When I got to the Jupps I found they were going to have a late dinner-party. They wanted me to stay for it. Fancy! in this dusty guise of a costume. How delicious those fish look!"

"Try them," said Mr. Lake, passing some to her. "I have not caught finer trout this season. Clara has some cold fowl in the house, I think, if you have not dined."

"I dined before I came over—that is, had a scrambling sort of cold-meat meal, half dinner, half lunch. Robert, I should like you to catch fish for me always."

"How are you getting on with the house, Penelope?" he asked. "Are you straight yet?"

"Oh, we are getting on. Anna's worth her weight in gold at that sort of thing. She has been used to contrive and work all her life, you know."

"She might be used to worse things," said Mr. Lake.

"I have got a—visitor coming to stay with

me," resumed Mrs. Chester, making a pause before the word visitor, and then going on with a cough, as if a fish-bone had stuck in her throat.

"Who is it?"

"Lady Ellis."

"Lady Ellis!" echoed Mr. Lake, unaware that his sister had any one of the name on her visiting list. "Who on earth is Lady Ellis?"

"Well, she is a friend of the Jupps'."

"Oh. And why is she going to visit you?"

"Because I choose to ask her," returned Mrs. Chester, in a reproving tone, meant for the public benefit, while she gave her brother a private kick under the table. "She is a widow lady, just come home from India in the depth of her sorrow; and she wants to find some quiet country seclusion to put her poor bereaved head into."

Mr. Lake concluded that the kick was intended as a warning against asking questions. He put a safe one.

"Is she staying with the Jupps?"

"Oh dear, no. She went to India a mere child, I fancy. She was very pretty, and was snapped up by some colonel, a K.C.B., and dreadfully old."

"Ellis by name, I presume?" carelessly remarked Mr. Lake, as he looked for another nice piece of fish for his sister's plate.

"Colonel Sir George Ellis," spoke Mrs. Chester, in a grandly reproving tone, as if the title were good for her mouth. "He is dead, and Lady Ellis has come home."

"With a lac of rupees?"

"With a *lack* of rupees," retorted Mrs. Chester, rubbing her sharp nose. "Sir George's property, every shilling of it, was settled on his first wife's children. Lady Ellis has money of her own—not very much."

"And why is she coming to you?"

"I have told you. She wants quiet and country air."

"Will she pay you?"

"Pay me! Good gracious, Robert, what mercenary ideas you have! Do you hear him, Clara? Oh, thank you; don't heap my plate like that, though I think I never did taste such fish. The Jupps have been praising her to the skies, one trying to out-talk the rest. Never were such talkers as the Jupp girls."

"Except yourself," put in Mr. Lake.

Mrs. Chester lifted her eyes in surprise.

"Myself! Why, I am remarkably silent. Nobody can say I talk."

He glanced at his wife as he suppressed a smile. The matter in regard to Lady Ellis puzzled him—at least, the proposed residence with Mrs. Chester; but he supposed he might not inquire further.

"Should you like to take home some trout, Penelope?"

"That I should. Have you any to give?"

"I'll have them put up for you, the fellow brace to these. Mind the youngsters don't get the bones in their throats."

"They must take their chance," was the philosophical reply. "Children were never sent for anything but our torment. I am going to pack the two young ones off to school."

"Have you further news from the Clergy Orphan School about James?"

"News! Yes. It is all cross together. There's not the least chance for him, they write me word, at the election in November; I must try again later. And now, Clara, I want you and your husband to come to me for Sunday and Monday. Will you promise? I came over purposely to ask you."

Mrs. Lake did not immediately answer.

"You can come on Sunday morning in time for church, and remain until Tuesday. I don't ask you to come on Saturday evening; we shall be busy until late. The Jupps are coming."

"All of them?" asked Mr. Lake.

"Not all. I don't know where I should put them. Some of the girls: Mary and Margaret for two; and Oliver. I have three spare bedrooms nearly ready."

"Three spare bedrooms? And you grumbling about the purse's shallowness!"

"Allow me to manage my own affairs," said Mrs. Chester, equably. "You will say 'Yes,' will you not, Clara? I want to show you my house; you have never seen it."

Clara Lake did say "Yes;" but at the same time there was a feeling in her heart prompting her to say "No." She neither listened to it nor gave way to it; and yet she was conscious that it was there, as she well remembered afterwards.

"And now I must be going," said Mrs. Chester, putting on her bonnet and mantle. "You will come with me to the station, Robert?"

They started together: he carrying the basket

of fish: and walked slowly. As he remarked, they had plenty of time.

"I know it," she said. "I came on early to talk to you."

"About Lady Ellis and her projected visit?" he quickly rejoined. "I thought there was some scheme agate by the kick you gave me."

"Robert, I must scheme to live."

"I think you must if you are to keep three spare bedrooms for visitors."

"I am left a widow, Robert, with a fair amount of furniture, and a wretched pittance of two hundred a year. How am I to live like a lady and educate the children?"

"But why need you have taken so large a house?"

"What am I to do? How am I to eke out my means? I cannot lose caste. I can't go and open a shop; I can't turn Court milliner; I can't begin and speculate in the funds; I can't present myself to the Government or the Bank of England directors, and make a curtsey, and say, 'Please, gentlemen, double my income for me, and then perhaps I can manage to get along.' *Can* I?" added Mrs. Chester, fiercely.

"I never said you could."

"No; I have only got my own resources to look to, and my own headpiece to work upon. It has been ransacked pretty well of late, I can tell you. The first idea that suggested itself to me was to educate Fanny at home with Anna Chester's help, and to get half-a-dozen pupils as well, on the plan of a private family. But I hated the thought of it. I have no nerves and no patience; and I knew I should be worried out of my very existence. Besides, education gets more fantastical every day, and I am not up to the modern rubbish they call requirements: so I said, 'That won't do.' Next I thought of getting three or four gentlewomen to live with me, on the plan of a private family. Quite as visitors, you know; and the longer I dwelt on the scheme the better I liked it. I thought it would be a pleasant, social way of getting on; and I determined to carry it out. Now you know why I have taken a large house, and am putting it into good order."

"That is, you are going to take boarders?"

"If you choose to put it in that plain way. You are so very downright, Robert. Lady Ellis is the first coming."

"How did you hear of her?"

"Never you mind," returned Mrs. Chester, who did not choose to say she had advertised. "Friends are looking out for me in London and elsewhere. I have had some correspondence with Lady Ellis, and she comes to me the middle of next week. She wants quiet, she says—quiet and country air. A most exquisite little hand she writes, only you can't read it at sight."

"Have you references?"

"Of course. She referred me to some people in London, and also in Cheltenham, where she is now staying. In her last letter she mentioned that the Jupps of Katterley knew her, and that's the chief thing that brought me over to-day. Mind, Robert, I did not tell the Jupps she was coming to me as a boarder: only as a visitor. 'She writes me that you know her,' I carelessly said to the girls, and they immediately began to tell all they did know, as I knew they would."

"What did they say?"

"Well, the whole of it did not amount to much. At first they persisted they had never heard of her, till I said she was formerly a Miss Finch, having lost sight of her when she went to India. They are charmed to hear she has come

back Lady Ellis, and think it will be delightful for me to have her with me."

"Unless you can get more boarders, Lady Ellis will prove a source of expense to you, Penelope, instead of a profit."

"You can't teach me," retorted Mrs. Chester. "I mean to get more."

"What is she to pay you?"

"Well, you know, Robert, I can't venture upon much style at first, wanting the means. I am unable to set up men-servants, and a service of plate, and a pony carriage, and that sort of thing: so at present my terms must be in accordance with my accommodation. Now what should you think fair?"

"I? Oh, nonsense! Don't ask me."

"Lady Ellis is to pay me a hundred pounds if she stays the year; if not, ten pounds per month. Now you see, if I get four at that rate, permanent inmates," went on Mrs. Chester, rapidly, "it will bring my income up to six hundred pounds, which will be comfortable, and enable one to live."

"I suppose it will."

"You suppose it will!" snapped Mrs. Chester, who was resenting his indifferent demeanour.

"It is as much as you and Clara possess. You live well."

"We have none too much. We spend it—all."

"And more imprudent of you to spend it all! as I have often thought of telling you, Robert Hunter. I wonder you can reconcile yourself to live up to the last penny of your income, and do nothing to increase it. How will it be when children come?"

"Ah, that's a question," said he, giving the fish-basket a twirl.

"You may have a large family yet; you are both young. What sort of a figure would your six hundred a year cut when everything had to come out of it? A dozen children to keep at home, and find in clothes, and doctors, and sundries, and a dozen children to provide for at school, would make your money look foolish."

"Let's see," cried he, gravely; "twelve at home and twelve at school would make twenty-four. Could you not have added twelve more while you were about it, and said thirty-six?"

"Don't be stupid! You know I meant twelve in all. They may come, for all you can tell; and they'll require both home expenses and school

expenses, as you will find. It is a sin and a shame, Robert, for a young capable man like you, to live an idle life."

"I tell myself so every other morning, Penelope."

She glanced at him, uncertain whether he spoke in jest or earnest. His dark-blue eyes had a serious look in them, but there was a smile on his pleasant lips.

"If you don't think well to take up civil engineering again, try something else. There's nothing like providing for a rainy day; and a man who lives up to his income cannot be said to do it. You cannot be altogether without interest; perhaps you might get a post under Government."

"I'll apply for the lord-lieutenancy," said he. "The place is vacant."

"I know you always turn into ridicule any suggestion of mine," again retorted Mrs. Chester. "You might get into the board of works, and leave the lord-lieutenancy for your betters. There's the train, shrieking in the distance. Don't forget Sunday. I wish you and Clara to see how nice the house looks."

"All right, Penelope; we will not forget.

But now I want to know why you could not have given your explanation before my wife."

"Her pride would have taken alarm."

"Indeed you cannot know Clara if you think that."

"I know her as well as you," returned Mrs. Chester. "I shall acquaint neither her nor the Jupps of the terms on which Lady Ellis is coming."

He said no more. To keep the fact from the clear-sighted, sensible Jupps would be just an impossibility; and he meant to tell his wife as soon as he got home. They passed through the waiting-room to the platform. Mrs. Chester took her seat in one of the carriages; he handed in the basket of trout, and stood back. Just before the train started, she suddenly beckoned to him.

"Robert," she began in a low voice, putting her head out at the window to speak, "I'm going to give you a caution. Don't you carry on any of that nonsensical flirting with Rose Jupp, should you ever happen to be together in the presence of Lady Ellis. You make yourself utterly ridiculous with that girl."

He looked very much amused. "A couple of

sinful scapegoats! I am astonished you ever have us at your house!"

"There you are, mocking me again. You may think as you please, Robert, but it is excessively absurd in a married man. I saw you kiss Rose Jupp the other day."

He broke into a laugh.

"Anything of that before Lady Ellis would be an awful mistake. It might frighten her away again."

"Oh, we will both put on our best behaviour for the old Begum. Do not let doubts of us disturb your sleep, Penelope."

"She is not old, but I daresay she knows what propriety is," sharply concluded Mrs. Chester as the train puffed off. And Mr. Lake, quitting the station, went home laughing.

He found his wife in a reverie. The feeling, that she had done wrong to promise to go to Mrs. Chester's, was making itself unmistakably heard, and Clara tried to analyse it. Why should it be wrong? It was difficult to say. Sunday travelling? But she had gone several times before to spend Sunday with Mrs. Chester, gone and returned the same day; for Guild Rectory, where Mrs. Chester had lived, was short of bed-

rooms. No, it was not the idea of Sunday travelling that disturbed her, and she could find no other reason. Finally she gave up the trouble of guessing, and her husband came in.

"Were you not too early for the train, Robert?"

"I should think so. Penelope confessed that she wiled me out to talk of her plans. I'll tell you about them directly. What do you think she wound up with, Clara, just as the train was starting?"

He had sat down in a large arm-chair, and was holding his wife before him by the waist.

"With an injunction not to flirt so much with Rose Jupp! Which is absurd in itself, she says, and might frighten away the grand Indian Begum."

Clara Lake laughed. She was accustomed to witness her husband's free rattling manners with others, but not a shadow of jealousy had yet arisen. She believed his *love* to be hers, just as truly and exclusively as hers was his; and nothing as yet had shaken the belief.

CHAPTER III.

CLARA LAKE'S DREAM.*

It was certainly a singular dream, well worthy of being recorded. Taken in conjunction with its notable working out, few dreams have been so remarkable. At least, if it may be deemed that subsequent events did work it out. The reader must judge.

Mr. and Mrs. Lake retired to rest as usual, eating no supper. When they had fish or meat with tea, supper was not served. On this evening he drank some wine-and-water before going to bed; she touched nothing. Therefore it cannot be thought she suffered from nightmare.

It was a singular dream; let me repeat the assertion. And it was in the earlier part of the night that it visited her. How soon after she

* The dream is not fiction: it is but transcribed, even to the minutest particular.

went to sleep, how late, there were no means of knowing.

Part of the evening's doings came to her again in her sleep. She thought that Mrs. Chester called, went on to the Jupps' house, returned to drink tea, and gave the invitation to go to her house at Guild on the Sunday—all just as it had been in reality. Clara also thought that she felt an insuperable objection to go, in spite of having accepted the invitation. Not the vague idea that had presented itself to her awake, the half-wish that she had not made the engagement, but a strong, irrepressible conviction that the going would bring her evil—but accompanied with a conviction, a knowledge, so to say, that she should go, that it was her fate to go, and that she could not avoid it. She dreamt that Mrs. Chester had departed, and that she was discussing the point with her husband. They were in a kitchen, a large kitchen quite strange to her, and were standing by a small, round, dark-coloured table in its middle. The fireplace, as Clara stood, was behind her; the window, a wide one, with an ironing board underneath it, was in front; a dresser with shelves was on her left hand; and there were several doors, leading

she did not know where. Altogether, the kitchen looked large and bleak, something like those we see in farm-houses: and, seated on a chair to the right, apparently engaged in sewing, and taking no notice of them, Clara suddenly saw Mrs. Chester. She and her husband were discussing earnestly—to go, or not to go. It appeared that both felt some evil was impending, but yet both knew they *should* go and encounter it, in spite of the hesitation: and yet Clara seemed to feel that her husband could have helped her to remain if he would. "What excuse can we make for declining?" she seemed to say to him, and then they both thought over various pleas, but none appeared to answer, and they came to the final conclusion that go they must; which they both had known throughout would be the conclusion. All the time they spoke, Mrs. Chester was sitting in her chair, listening, but taking no notice; and upon arriving at the decision Clara and her husband parted, he going towards one of the kitchen doors, she towards the window; but so sharp was the conviction that she was rushing upon evil, that she awoke.

Clara thought it a curious dream—curious because it represented what had actually oc-

curred, and the bent of her own feelings; curious also because it was so unusually vivid, so like reality. She got out of bed quietly, not to disturb her husband, struck a wax match, and looked at the hanging watch. It was exactly three o'clock.

But the dream was not yet over. She went to sleep again, taking up the thread almost at the point where she had left it. She remembered all that had passed, *both of dream and reality;* she remembered that she awoke in the certainty that she could not go beside the dreaded expedition; all *that* was plain in this, her second sleep, but she now began making strenuous exertions to escape. She did not see her husband again, but Mary Ann and Margaret Jupp had joined Mrs. Chester, and the three seemed to be forcing her to go. Not by force of violence, but of argument, of persuasion; and she still seemed to know that they must prevail, that to withstand at the last would be beyond her power.

The time appeared to change to the morning of departure: or rather, with that inconsistency peculiar to dreams, it appeared to be the morning of the departure without having changed. Still she strove against it; not saying why, not hint-

ing that she feared evil; of that, she had only spoken with her husband; but striving, not to go, by every possible argument, and by *passive* resistance. And—strange inconsistency!—it appeared that if she could have told them the reason of her reluctance, her dread of evil, all would have been well; but it was precisely to them she must not and dared not tell it.

To any who may fancy the description of the dream unnecessarily spun out, the small details too much dwelt upon, I would say just a word. It is difficult to shorten that real dream of midnight sufficiently for it to be told within reasonable bounds. No pen can trace its particulars as they appeared; no power of language describe them as they were pictured. And now to resume it.

Mrs. Chester and the Miss Jupps urged her to depart; were waiting for her. Clara Lake resisted. "There!" she suddenly exclaimed to them, "we cannot go. It is past ten: we have let the hour go by, and the train is gone." "Oh!" said Mrs. Chester, "we can get a carriage and overtake it." She went out with them—resistance appeared to be over; she *felt* that it was over, and that she could not help

herself—went out to look for a carriage. They ran about, down lanes and in the open fields, and could not see one; but a butcher's cart came up in the lane; one of them said that would do as well as a carriage, and they all got into it. They seemed to fly, going along at a fearful pace, but through a most dreary-looking country, the skies gloomy, the scenery barren, and the road muddy, so muddy that it splashed up upon them as they sat: there were also shallow, dismal ponds through which they drove. All this haste seemed to be to catch the train, but suddenly a noise was heard behind them, and it was known that it was the train: they had gone so fast as to outstrip it. Their cart stopped to wait, and Clara, when the noise came close, looked behind, but could only distinguish something black which whirled by them, turned round, came back, turned again, and pulled up. "Why, it is a hearse!" she screamed out (but in surprise, not fear), to Mrs. Chester. Yes, it was a hearse, all black, and two men sat upon the box. Clara looked out, expecting to see the rest of their party *on* it, but there was no one but the two men: the one she could not see, for he seemed to hide his face; but she caught, fixed upon her,

the strangely black eyes of the driver, the blackest eyes she ever saw in her life: of the rest of his face she remembered nothing. "Come," said he, "there's no time to lose;" and they all four descended from the cart. Clara got on to the hearse first, and was settling her cloak around her, when she heard the cart drive off, taking the road home again; and, seated in it as before, were Mrs. Chester and Mary and Margaret Jupp. "Why don't you come with me?" she called out; "why are you going back?" "No," said Mrs. Chester, "that hearse is for you, not for us;" and they drove off. The hearse also drove off the contrary way, and Mrs. Lake found herself sinking into its interior. She was calm enough for a moment, but suddenly she knew that she had been entrapped into it, and that she was being taken to her burial.

With a dreadful scream she awoke.

The scream awoke Mr. Lake. She was bathed in perspiration, and shaking as in an ague fit. In vain he asked what was the matter, whether she was ill: she could not speak to tell him, and it was several minutes before she was able in any degree to overcome the fright, or relate it to him.

Robert Lake had no belief in dreams; was given to scoff at them; but he had too much regard for his wife to attempt to scoff then, in her extremity of distress and agitation. He got up and lighted a lamp, for though morning was glimmering it could not be said to be yet light.

"I am quite certain that it is sent to me as a warning," she exclaimed; "and I will not go on Sunday to Guild."

"I never knew before that you could believe in dreams," he answered.

"I do not believe in dreams; I have never had any particular dreams to believe in. But you must acknowledge, Robert, that this one is beyond common. I cannot describe to you how vivid, how *real* everything appeared to me. And it was not one dream; it was two: that at least is unusual. The second dream was a continuation of the first."

"The one induced the other. I dare say you saw a hearse pass yesterday?"

"I have not seen a hearse for ever so long," she answered, still shivering. "But, go to your sister's, I will not. Thank heaven! though the power to refuse was not mine in the dream, it is in reality."

But that it was not the time to do it, he could have laughed outright at the superstitious folly. He spoke pleasant, loving words to her, almost as one would to a frightened child, trying to soothe her back to tranquillity.

"Clara; consider! the very fact of your being able to act as you please, which it seems you could not do in the dream, ought to convince you how void of meaning it was."

"I will not go to Mrs. Chester's," was all she reiterated, with a strange sigh of relief—a sense of thanksgiving that the option was assuredly hers.

"Wait for the morning sun," said he. "You will be in a different mood then."

She did not rise so soon as usual. She had got to sleep again at last, first of all making a firm inward resolution that no persuasion, no ridicule, no "morning sun"—in whose cheery rays things indeed wear a different aspect from what they do in the dark and weird night—should suffice to alter her determination. The warning against going she fully believed to have been sent to her, and she would abide by it.

Mr. Lake waited breakfast for his wife. She came down in her delicate muslin dress, looking

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as pretty as usual. At first she made no allusion to the past night; neither did he—he hoped it was at an end; but when breakfast was about half over, she glanced up at him in her rather shy manner, speaking in a low tone.

"I have a request to beg of you, Robert—that you will not mention this dream to any one. I will make some other excuse for not going to Guild."

"Dream!" cried he, speaking with his mouth full. "Why, Clary, I had already forgotten it. And so will you before the day shall be over."

She shook her head.

"I shall send word to Penelope that I cannot go."

Mr. Lake put down his knife and fork and gazed at her in astonishment. To his sober, practical mind, his careless nature, this in truth savoured of the ridiculous.

"Clara, you will never be so foolish! I gave you credit for better sense. Dreams are all very well in their places—to amuse old women and children—but in these days they should not be allowed to influence actions. You can see the bright sunshine, the busy work-a-day world around you, and yet you can retain remem-

brance of a ridiculous dream! I thought dreams passed away with the night."

"Of course a great part of the vivid impression has passed with the night," she replied, confessing what was the actual fact; "but I will abide by the night's impression, nevertheless. I look at it in this light—my remaining at home can hurt no one, it cannot bring harm in any way, while my going may bring me harm; we cannot tell. I am fully decided," she continued, in a firm tone; "and do you eat your breakfast and cease staring at me."

"Perhaps you fear the train will come to grief, and pitch us all into coffins made to fit your hearse."

"Well, I don't know," returned Clara. "If I did get into the train on Sunday morning, I should be unusually pleased to find myself safe out of it again."

Mr. Lake said no more; in this frame of mind reasoning was useless. But he felt persuaded the fancy would wear away, and his wife go contentedly enough with the rest of them.

Nothing more was said that day, which was Friday. On the next day, Saturday, two of the Miss Jupps called on Clara, full of the following

morning's excursion. A large family was that of the Jupps—six sons and six daughters, all living. The sons were out in the world—one in the army, one in the navy, one in the church, one reading for the bar, one here, one there; Oliver, the youngest of them, was just now at home. The six daughters were all at home, and marrying men seemed to fight shy of so large a host. Social, pleasant, chatty girls were they, the youngest two-and-twenty, the age of the eldest locked up in the church's register. Mr. and Mrs. Jupp were a quiet, inoffensive couple, completely eclipsed by their sons and daughters; not that any were undutiful, but the old people belonged to a bygone age, and were scarcely equal to the innovations of this. Mr. Jupp had once been high sheriff of the county: it was the one great event of the Jupps' life, imparting to them an importance which their pride never quite lost sight of. They lived in a large house abutting on the street of Katterley, about five minutes' walk from Mr. Lake's.

Mary Ann and Margaret Jupp had come to gossip about the proposed Sunday excursion. They were pleasant, voluble girls (to pay them the compliment of still calling them girls), with

light hazel eyes and reddish hair. The sisters were all much alike—these two, the eldest; Louisa and Rose, the youngest. They had on flimsy skirts, nankeen-coloured jackets, and straw hats. They sat in the shady room open to the trailing honeysuckles, talking to Clara.

"Our plans are changed," spoke Mary. "Oliver, Louisa, and Rose go to-morrow, returning home to sleep, and I and Margaret go over the next day."

"We think it would be so truly unconscionable to inflict four of us on Mrs. Chester at once, with her few servants, that we have written to tell her we will divide ourselves," interrupted Margaret, who liked to have her share of tongue. "Mamma says she wondered at our thoughtlessness when she heard us making the bargain."

"Mrs. Chester would not have made a trouble of it," answered Clara. "She is not one to put herself out of the way."

"No, she is very good; but it would have been imposing on hospitality," said Mary Jupp. "For that very reason, as mamma observed, we ought to spare her. So Louisa and Rose spend Sunday with her; I and Margaret Monday; Oliver goes both days."

"But you will remain for Tuesday?"

"No. Until she has her house in complete order it would be unfair to trouble her with night guests. You and Mr. Lake of course will remain the whole time. And now to deliver Louisa's message. Shall they call for you here to-morrow morning, or will you be at the train?"

"I am not going," replied Mrs. Lake.

"Not going!" echoed Mary Jupp. "Good gracious! Why not?"

"It is not quite convenient. Mrs. Chester does not expect me."

"But she did expect you!" exclaimed Mary, in wonder. "Oliver saw Mr. Lake that night after he had taken Mrs. Chester to the train, and he told him you were going. Did you not?" she added, appealing to Mr. Lake, who sat perched on a side table doing something to a fishing-line.

"All right," nodded he.

"Yes, we did promise; but since then I have altered my mind, and have written to Mrs. Chester," said Clara. "I shall go later, when she is more settled."

"Well, I never heard of such a thing!" cried

Margaret Jupp. "Oliver and the girls will be in a way! I don't think they care to go but for the pleasure of your company. Mr. Lake, why have you changed your minds?"

"Ask Clara," returned he, without looking up. "It's her affair, not mine."

The delicate pink in Clara Lake's cheeks grew a shade brighter as the two ladies looked at her and awaited the explanation. Not choosing to mention the dream, she was at a loss for any sound plea to make.

"I seem to have a prejudice against going to-morrow," she said, feeling how lame were the words. "And—and I wrote to Mrs. Chester, telling her not to expect me."

"How very odd!" cried Margaret Jupp. They were keen-sighted, those girls, and felt sure there was some suppressed reason.

"The truth is, my wife has taken it into her head that Sunday travelling is sinful," cried Mr. Lake, partly to help Clara out of her dilemma, partly in the indulgence of the mocking spirit he liked so well. "If we do venture to go to-morrow, in the teeth of the sin, she thinks the engine will infallibly burst and blow us up."

Mrs. Lake felt vexed. It was precisely the

fear her imagination induced her to take. Unable to conceive any other probable danger, she was unconsciously casting doubts on the safe convoy of the train. But she had not confessed it to him.

"Do not talk nonsense," she said to her husband; and Mary and Margaret Jupp looked from one to the other, not knowing what to think.

"My dear Mrs. Lake, they get to Guild for morning service, you know," spoke Margaret. "I don't see any great harm in going just that little way on a Sunday morning."

"Robert is very stupid to say such things," returned Mrs. Lake, driven into a corner. "I did not think anything about its being a sin. The sin is not my objection."

"The train runs whether we passengers go in it or not; so that our staying away is not of the least benefit in a religious point of view," logically argued Mary Jupp. "Do pray go, Mrs. Lake."

"Not to-morrow," Clara gently said, shaking her head.

"Can't you induce her, Mr. Lake?"

"I! I have wasted all my powers of oratory;

I have tried persuasion; I have hinted at an illegitimate application of my riding-whip, and all in vain. She's harder than a brickbat."

The young ladies laughed. "Dear Mrs. Lake, you must go, if only to oblige us. Think of the disappointment to Louisa and Rose."

Clara remembered her dream: how Mary Ann and Margaret (the very two of the sisters now present) had striven in it to persuade her. The recollection only served to render her more firm. They began to fear that there would be no prevailing, and felt half inclined to be offended. "And yourself, Mr. Lake? Do you also remain at home?"

"Not I. I don't live in fear of the boiler's treachery."

"Of course I do not wish to prevent my husband's going," said Mrs. Lake, hastily.

"Though you know you would rather I did not," he rejoined.

"Well, of course, if there is to be—as you say, though I don't—a bursting of the boiler, it would be as bad for you to be in it as for me," she said, affecting a light laugh. The truth was, she did wish he would not go; she knew that she should feel more easy; though she would not ask

him to remain, lest it might seem selfish. The Miss Jupps rose to leave.

"I hope you will think better of it," said Margaret. "Louisa was saying this morning how glad she was Mrs. Lake was going. She has been counting on you."

"Ah, well—she had better count upon me instead," cried Mr. Lake, as he left his seat to attend them to the gate. "And mind you give my love to Rose, and tell her I shall be a bachelor for the day."

"Don't forget that," put in Clara.

The two ladies walked away, commenting on what had passed. Clara Lake was a poor actor, and her manner had betrayed that the true reason had not been spoken. Margaret said she should put it down to "caprice;" but both acknowledged that they had never known Mrs. Lake capricious before.

Never did a more lovely day dawn than that Sunday in August. Not another word upon the subject had been exchanged between Mr. Lake and his wife since the visit of the Miss Jupps; she shunned it, feeling half ashamed of herself for her persistent folly; he had given the matter up for a bad job. After breakfast they stood

together, looking from the open window. The church bells rang out; Mr. Lake's time for departure was drawing near.

"I must not miss the train," he carelessly observed. "'Twould be a pity to lose the excursion such a morning as this."

"It is a most beautiful day," she sighed. "I almost envy you."

"Clara," he said, turning to her with a sudden seriousness of manner, "I ask you to be yourself. Lay aside this folly, and act as a reasonable woman ought. Put on your things and come with us."

She moved closer to him and spoke deprecatingly. "Do not be angry with me, Robert; I believe I am doing right to remain away. I must remain."

"Well, of all the simpletons that ever walked, you are about the worst," was his complimentary rejoinder as he caught up his gloves. "Goodbye, Clary," he added, stooping to kiss her.

"Oh, Robert, I hope you will come back safely!" she said, clinging to him as if she feared he was going away for ever; and the tone of her voice, full of mournful wailing, struck upon the ear of her husband.

Nevertheless he went off laughing, telling her not to fear—that he'd come back with all his legs and wings about him.

On the platform he met Louisa and Rose Jupp under the convoy of their brother. "Then actually Mrs. Lake is *not* coming!" exclaimed Louisa.

"And I have only come to see you off," was Mr. Lake's response. "I am not going on to Guild."

"Oh, you barbarous deceiver!" quoth Rose. "Where are you going?"

"To church, as a respectable individual of modern society ought."

"I tell you what, Lake," interrupted Oliver Jupp, a dark, short young man, quiet and sensible, "this is not fair. These girls entrapped me into taking them, on the strength that you were to be one of the party, and it's too bad to shuffle off it."

"So it is," returned Mr. Lake. "But you must talk to my wife about it. I am the most hopelessly henpecked husband your worst fancy ever pictured; Caudle was nothing to it."

The train went smoothly off, and Mr. Lake returned home. His wife was leisurely attiring

herself for church. She started when she saw him. "Why, Robert, what has happened?"

"Nothing. The boiler has not gone up yet; that calamity is expected to take place midway between here and Guild."

"Why have you come back?"

"I came back because I have got a silly child for my wife," he said, standing in front of her, and speaking half tenderly, half severely. "One who would have worried her foolish heart into a fever, had I gone, believing I should never come back alive."

She wound her arms round him and pulled his face down to hers in her fervent love, her tears falling upon it. "Oh, my darling! my dearest! you don't know how happy you have made me!" she passionately whispered. "How shall I thank you for giving way to my foolishness? I *should* have been in unhappy suspense all day long."

"I shan't give way to it the next time," cried he, as he kissed away her tears. "And I have told the girls what a henpecked husband I am, the slave of a capricious tyrant. Jupp won't be in a hurry to marry after my warning example before his eyes."

"The next time!" she repeated, with a sad

smile. "Robert, there will be no next time. I shall never have such a dream again."

The Jupps went grumbling all the way to Guild. That is, the young ladies grumbled, and their brother listened. The disappointment was really great. Mr. and Mrs. Lake were great favourites with everybody; just those people that make society brighter for their presence.

"Margaret says Clara Lake was taken with a capricious fit."

"Nonsense, Louisa!" spoke Oliver, at length. "She has too much innate good feeling for caprice. Mrs. Chester has been at her domineering ways, I expect, and frightened her poor little sister-in-law."

Guild reached, they found their way to Mrs. Chester's house, which was just outside the town, some ten minutes' walk from the station. It was a pretty place—old-fashioned but commodious; standing in the midst of a productive garden, with windows opening to a large lawn. It used to be called Guild Farm; Mrs. Chester had already changed that, and rechristened it "Guild Lawn." She had it at a cheap rent. There were two houses on the farm, and the farmer who rented the land lived in the other:

to let this was so much gain to him. Guild Rectory, where Mrs. Chester had hitherto lived, was at the opposite end of the town.

The Reverend James Chester, her late husband, had been a poor curate for the greater portion of his life. He, his first wife (who was a cousin of the Jupps), and their only child, Anna, had lived on his country curacy of one hundred a year. He had no residence; and none, save themselves, knew the shifts they had been put to—the constant scheming and contriving they had been forced to exercise to live as gentlepeople and keep up appearances out of doors. His wife died; and, close upon it, the bishop gave him the living of St. Thomas, at Guild. Its emoluments were a small house and three hundred a year—great riches in the eyes of the Reverend James Chester. He next married Penelope Hunter, who had two hundred a year of her own. Three children were subsequently born, Fanny, Thomas, and James. When the girl was ten years old and the youngest boy six, Mr. Chester died; and Mrs. Chester was left with Anna and her own children on her hands, a little good furniture and her two hundred a year to bring them up upon. So—as she told

her half-brother—she had to scheme to live: she took this house, and hoped that would help her to do it.

"Well, and now what's the reason that Robert and Clara have not come?" began Mrs. Chester, without any other greeting, as she stood, bonnet and mantle on, to receive her guests. "I should like to know what Clara means by it! I had the coolest letter from her!—just putting off her visit to a future time, without saying with your leave or by your leave."

Fine nuts for the Miss Jupps to crack! They hastily recounted what had passed at their sisters' interview with Mrs. Lake, and her husband's words at the train in the morning. There was no time for more.

"If you ask my opinion," said Louisa Jupp, as they hurried off to the nearest church, "I should say that Mrs. Lake has acquired an objection to Sunday travelling."

"What a crotchet!" concluded Mrs. Chester. "I never quite understood my brother's wife."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ACCIDENT.

It was a fine night, though not unusually light, for there was no moon, and the heavens looked a little misty, as they do sometimes following on a hot August day.

The nine o'clock train dashed into Guild, received its waiting passengers, and dashed on again.

Amidst others, the Miss Jupps and their brother entered it, having finished their day's visit to Mrs. Chester. They took their seats in the middle compartment of a first-class carriage, and happened to have it to themselves. The young ladies sat with their backs to the engine, he with his face to it.

"The Lakes would have had a pleasant day had they come," remarked Louisa. "You may rely upon it her objection lay in its being Sunday. Perhaps she is growing religious."

"What an awful look-out for Lake!" spoke up Mr. Jupp, from his corner.

"Oliver!" reproved the young ladies.

"She'll stop his liberty and his cigars," persisted Mr. Oliver: "there are no such martinets under the sun as your religious wives. Talking about cigars, would it affect your bonnets, girls, if I lighted one now?"

They screamed out together. They would not have their loves of new bonnets poisoned and blackened with cigar smoke; they'd never be fit to go on again. "And you must not smoke in these carriages," added Louisa: "we are near Coombe Dalton station, and the guard would see you."

"Pretty wives you'll make when you are married," remarked Oliver. "Afraid of cigar smoke!"

The caution, or the bonnets, caused Oliver Jupp to keep his cigar-case in his pocket. Coombe Dalton station, an insignificant one, was about midway between Guild and Katterley. The train did not stop at it. Oliver leaned from the window to take a survey of the route.

"We are close to it," said he; "yonder are the lights. Halloa! what's the red light flash-

ing up and down for? That ought to be a green."

"If a red light is waving in the green's place, there must be danger," said Rose, quickly. "Red is the danger signal."

"There's no danger. If the light indicated danger the train would come to a stand-still; it is going on at the same speed."

Scarcely had the words quitted Oliver Jupp's mouth when—they scarcely knew what occurred. There was a shriek from the whistle, a shock; and a shriek, not from the whistle, but from human beings in their terror. The train came to a stand-still and they with it: they and their carriage were not hurt or inconvenienced; the carriages behind them were not hurt, nor the carriages immediately before them, but the foremost carriages——What had happened?

Unstopped, and dashing on in its speed and recklessness, the engine had dashed into some obstruction on the line, a little past Coombe Dalton station. It ran up a bank, gave a dance, and was forced back on the line, falling sideways, and the three foremost carriages, next to the break van, were dragged with it. The two first, third-class ones, were greatly injured; the third, a

second class, less so. Oliver Jupp, with other male passengers, was speedily out of his carriage, running forward to see what assistance he could render to those, his ill-fated fellow-creatures, some of whom were groaning in the death agony.

What a scene it was! The dark night; the hissing engine, mad instrument of death, but harmless now; the torches brought forward from the station to throw light upon the calamity; the figures, some dead, some dying, lying in the midst of the wreck; the scalded, the wounded, the bleeding; the silent and the still, the moaning and the helpless, the shrieking and the terrified! Not here, gratuitously to harrow feelings and sympathies, will the worst details be given; and, adding no little to the distress and confusion prevailing, was the uncontrollable alarm of the uninjured passengers, escaping from their carriages and running hither and thither, uncertain where to go or what to do. Katterley (as well as other stations) was telegraphed to for medical assistance.

Meanwhile Robert Lake and his wife had spent an exceedingly sober day. With the passing of the chance of danger, Clara's opinion experienced a sort of revulsion; and she began to

think—not so much of how foolish she had been, but of how foolish she must appear in the eyes of her practical husband. She said nothing; it was the wisest plan; and he had not alluded to it in any way. Quietly the day dragged on, and they sat down to supper in the evening; the dinner hour on Sunday being two o'clock.

It was at this juncture that Mary Jupp burst in without any ceremony whatever, neither bonnet on her head nor shawl on her shoulders. The news of the accident had spread like wildfire and penetrated to the house of the Jupps. Of course it had lost nothing in carrying; and Mary Jupp fully believed she should never see her sisters or brother again alive.

"Oh, Mr. Lake!—and you to be sitting here quietly at supper! Have you not heard the news?"

They rose up: they saw the state of alarm and agitation she was in. Clara caught the infection, and looked as frightened as her impromptu visitor. Mr. Lake was calm, cool; man in general is so.

"What news?" he asked. "What is it?"

"There has been an awful accident to the train at Coombe Dalton. No particulars posi-

tively known, that we can learn, but people are saying half the train's killed and the other half wounded."

"Sit down, sit down," said Mr. Lake, taking her trembling hands. "What train? How did the news come?"

"Why, our train!" returned the excited girl, bursting into tears. "The train that Oliver and Louisa and Rose must be in. Oh, Mrs. Lake! was it true that you had a presentiment of evil happening to it?—was that really your reason for declining to go?"

Clara, deathly pale, had sought the eyes of her husband. She was overwhelmed with astonishment and dismay; with a feeling that she could not describe and had never yet experienced. Had they really escaped danger, accident, perhaps death, from that strangely vivid dream of warning? Her faculties seemed bewildered.

"How has the news reached Katterley?" repeated Mr. Lake, drowning the words about the dream, for he was conscious that a thoughtless slip of his had given the clue to Miss Jupp.

"By telegraph," she answered; "and one of the porters ran up to our house to tell it, knowing Oliver and the girls went to Guild this morn-

ing and took return tickets. The station here is already besieged by a crowd. Poor papa is pushing his way through it."

Mr. Lake caught up his hat, when at the same moment who should come in but Oliver Jupp. Mary seized upon him with a cry.

"Now don't smother me," cried he to her. "First of all, we are all right; you see I am, and Rose and Louy are safe and well inside Coombe Dalton Station. My father sent me in to tell you; he said you were here; and he is gone home to reassure them."

"But, Jupp, how did you get to Katterley?" questioned Mr. Lake.

"I came on a stray engine. I thought they would all be in fits together at home, and I took the opportunity offered, of coming on to stop the alarm. The first person who laid hold of me at the station was the poor old governor, pretty nearly in a fit himself. It's an awful accident, though."

"How was it?" "Are many hurt?" "Did the boiler really burst?"

"If you all reiterate questions at me at once, how am I to answer? Very few are hurt, comparatively speaking. The engine went into

something, a truck or trucks I believe, and there was a smash. The two first carriages, both third-class, are—nowhere, and the passengers I won't tell you about, Lake, before these two girls, for it would spoil their night's rest. The next carriage, a second-class, was damaged, and its inmates are bruised, but not much, I think."

"And what of the rest of the train?" breathlessly inquired Clara.

"Nothing. The carriages came to a standstill on the line, and we got out of them."

"Are you sure there is no first-class carriage injured?" she continued.

"Certain. So to speak, there has been no accident to the rest of the train, beyond the delay and fright."

Mr. Lake looked at his wife and smiled. "So you would not have been one of the injured, Clary, had you been in the train."

She shook her head. "We have not the full particulars yet. Oliver may be deceived."

"It is exactly as I tell you, Mrs. Lake," said Oliver Jupp. "There is no further damage."

"Are you going back to Coombe Dalton?"

"Yes, as soon as I can. But I thought it

well to come on and let you know the best and worst. Lake, will you go with me?"

"Of course," he answered.

The two young men went out together. Mary Jupp ran home, and Clara waited the return of her husband.

It was long past midnight when he came in. They sat up talking over the accident; the details which he had learnt, and seen. Oliver Jupp had been quite correct in his limit of the damage. Mrs. Chester (taking up the suggested notion that Clara Lake had stayed away because it was Sunday) had sent a very pressing invitation for her and her husband to come on the following day, Monday, with the two elder Miss Jupps. Mr. Lake delivered it to her.

"Will you go, Clara?"

"Will *they* go?" she rejoined. "Will they venture?"

"Venture!"

"After this accident?"

"I do not see why they should not. An accident two days running would be something remarkable. What about your dream?"

"Oh, I will go, Robert. Yes. The dream has done its office and I shall be ever thankful for it."

She spoke the last words reverently. Mr. Lake looked at her with surprise.

"Clara, don't encourage that fancy of yours," he gravely said, his voice taking almost a stern tone. "To be superstitious at all argues a want of common sense; but to be *foolishly* superstitious is a great deal worse. No reasonable being, wife of mine, would indulge *that*."

"What do you call being foolishly superstitious?"

"The remark you have just made—that the dream had done its office, and you should ever feel thankful for it—is an illustration. Had you gone to Guild this morning, you know quite well that we were not to have returned until Tuesday, therefore should not have been in the train to-night."

"Something might have occurred to cause us to return," she interrupted.

"Granted—for the sake of the argument. We should have travelled in a first-class carriage, as you know; and there is no first-class carriage injured."

He paused and looked at her. She could not deny anything he said, and kept silence.

"Therefore, what possible bearing that dream

could have had upon the accident, or where could be the utility of the warning, which, as you declare, it conveyed to you, not to go to Guild, I cannot see."

Neither, it must be confessed, did Clara herself see it; but she did not lose her faith in the dream. Rather believed in it all the more firmly, in what her husband would have called a manner void of all reason.

The dream, as she looked at it and expressed it, had "done its work;" and she anticipated the excursion on the morrow with renewed pleasure, springing from a sense of relief.

Alas, alas! Poor short-sighted mortals that we are! The working out of the ill, shadowed forth, was only just beginning.

The morning rose brilliantly; rather too much so, taken in conjunction with the heat; and the day, as it wore on, promised to be one of the hottest on record.

Katterley station was in a bustle not often experienced at the quiet little place. People, idlers and others, crowded it, bent on a journey of curiosity to Coombe Dalton. The deaths from the accident now numbered several, and excitement was rife. Report came that the real cause

of the calamity was giving rise to dispute: on the one hand it was said that the driver of the train had dashed through Coombe Dalton station, regardless of the warning red light, held up as a signal that he should stop; on the other it was maintained that no red light had so been held.

The twelve o'clock train came steaming into the Katterley station, where it would stay its accustomed three minutes, and those going by it looked alive. A very few passengers got out; a vast many rushed up to take their places. People were flocking to Coombe Dalton *en masse;* and would be flocking there until public curiosity was sated.

A porter held open the door of a first-class carriage for a party who were struggling on to the platform, one running before another; it consisted of two gentlemen, three ladies, and a maid-servant. The porter knew them well and touched his cap; Mr. and Mrs. Lake, Oliver Jupp, and his two eldest sisters.

"Let us have the compartment to ourselves, if you can manage it, Johnson," said Oliver in an under tone. "The day is too hot for crowding."

"Very well, sir," replied the man. "I dare say I can contrive it."

"But now whereabouts *is* this carriage?" called out one of the ladies, in a hasty and rather shricking voice, as she looked to the right and left; "because, if it's not just in the middle, I won't get in. I'll never put myself towards either end of a train again as long as I live."

"Step in, step in," cried Oliver to her. "You are all right."

"Make haste, miss," added the porter. "The time's up."

"Of course it's up," repeated the young lady, who was no other than Mary Ann Jupp; "and I wonder it wasn't up before we reached it. This comes of putting off things till the last moment. I told you all the clocks were slow and we should be late. If there's one thing I hate more than another, it's the being obliged to rush up and catch a train at the last moment! No time to choose your carriage—no time to see or do anything; they may put you in the guard's van if they please, and you not know it until you are off. I dare say we have come without our tickets now. Has anybody thought of them?"

In reply, Oliver Jupp held up the six bits of cardboard for his sister's satisfaction, and the

party settled themselves in their seats; the maid-servant, who was Mrs. Lake's, entering last.

"Why, Elizabeth, is that you?" exclaimed Miss Jupp. "I declare I never saw you."

"Didn't you, miss?" replied the girl, who was very tall and thin. "I walked behind you from our house."

"I thought it better to bring Elizabeth," interposed Clara Lake, who was looking unusually lovely in her summer dress—white muslin with a blue sprig upon it. "Mrs. Chester's servants will be glad of help with so many of us to wait upon."

"Mrs. Chester is the best manager of a house I ever saw," cried the Miss Jupps in a breath. They wore alpaca gowns of very light green, and hats trimmed with velvet. "Fancy!" added Margaret, "only two servants, and one of those you may almost call a nurse, for the children require plenty of attending to, and yet things seem to go on smoothly. I can't think how she contrives it."

"Trust to Mrs. Chester for contriving," said Mr. Lake. "She has to do it. Besides, you forget Anna."

The carriage held eight. Elizabeth sat at the

farther end, the seat next to her and the seat opposite to her being empty. She kept her head close to the open window, looking out. Railway travelling was rare in her experience. The rest chatted eagerly, giving themselves up to the pleasure of the moment. Something was said about the previous day's sojourn at Guild.

"I hear it was a delightful party," Mrs. Lake remarked to Oliver Jupp.

"We wanted you and Lake to complete it," he answered. "It was too bad, Mrs. Lake, to declare off, after having promised to go. There was an uncommon nice girl spending the day there. She's to be there again to-day, I fancy."

"Who was that?" inquired Mr. Lake, briskly, who had a propensity for liking "nice girls."

"Don't know who she was, or anything about her," replied Oliver. "Your sister called her Lydia, and I did the same."

"It was a Miss Clapperton," interrupted Margaret Jupp. "Louisa and Rose were telling me about her this morning; they took an immense fancy to her."

"Clapperton? — Clapperton?" repeated Mr. Lake. "Oh, I know; a fresh family who have come lately to Guild. Penelope said she was get-

ting intimate with them. You shall not pick out nice girls for me, Jupp, if you call her one. I saw her once: a young Gorgon in spectacles, with prominent eyes."

"That's Nancy Clapperton, the near-sighted one," corrected Mary Jupp, who was one of those ladies who like to put the world to rights. "It was her sister who was there yesterday, and she is a charming girl. Louy and Rose both say so."

"I hope she'll be there to-day, then," said Mr. Lake.

"She is to be there; but don't you and Oliver quarrel over her. He monopolized her yesterday, I hear."

"We'll go snacks," said Mr. Lake. "Or else draw lots: which shall it be, Jupp? When does the old Indian Begum make her entry?"

"For shame, Mr. Lake! You do turn everything and everybody into ridicule," exclaimed Margaret. "I'm sure I think she will be a delightful acquisition; so pleasant for your sister to have a visitor."

"Well, when does she come? Nobody says she won't be an acquisition—for those who can

stand Begums. I knew one once, and she was awful. She had gold teeth."

Margaret Jupp turned to Clara.

"Why don't you keep your husband in better order? He is incorrigible."

"I fear he is," was the answer, given with a gay smile.

"Very strange!" cried Mr. Lake. "I can't get an answer to my question: I think it's somebody else that's incorrigible. When—does—the — Begum — arrive? I hope that's plain enough."

"Mrs. Chester was talking of her yesterday to me," interposed Oliver Jupp. "The Begum is expected to make her entrance on Wednesday or Thursday."

"When the house shall have been cleared of us sinful people," added Mr. Lake. "We are not good enough for an Indian Begum. What do you know of this one?"

"As good as nothing," answered Margaret Jupp. "That is, of late years. Papa and mamma used to know old Mr. and Mrs. Finch. He was a lawyer somewhere in London, and Angeline was the daughter."

"Angeline!"

"That's her name. Isn't it a fine one?"

"Very," said Mr. Lake. "The baptismal people must have foreseen she was destined to be a Begum."

The arrival at Coombe Dalton interrupted the conversation. Slackening its speed, the train came to a standstill. They inquired of a porter how long it stayed, and understood him to say "ten" minutes. So they got out, and heard almost immediately the train puff on again. The man had said "two." Looking at each other in consternation, a laugh ensued. The next train came up at three o'clock, and they could only wait.

Plenty of time now to examine the scene of the accident. They were not the only spectators. The battered engine, the *débris* of the carriages were there still—not on the line, but drawn away from it.

"In shunting some trucks on to the other line, one of them broke down, and could not be got off before our train came up," explained Oliver Jupp. "The engine ran into it, and—we were done for."

"But how dreadfully careless of the people at the station to allow your engine to run into it!"

exclaimed Margaret. "They ought to have signalled your train to stop."

"They did signal it," interrupted a strange voice at her elbow, and Margaret turned to see the station-master, who was known to her brother and Mr. Lake. "The red lights were exhibited at the station, and a switchman waved the red signal light up and down, all to no purpose. You observe that post," he added, pointing to an iron post or pillar close to them, for he perceived she looked as if she scarcely understood him: "that is the night signal-post. When the line is clear, a green light is exhibited on it, as a notice that the trains may pass; but when it is not clear, a red light is substituted, and no train must proceed when the red light is there. Not only was the red light shown there last night, but the switchman, alarmed at the train's coming on so quickly, seized it, and waved it to enforce attention. The driver took no notice, and came dashing on to destruction."

"Was he killed?" inquired one of the bystanders, a knot of whom had gathered round.

"No," replied the station-master; "and his escape is regarded as next door to a miracle. He was flung from the engine, lay motionless, and

was carried off for dead; but it appears he was only stunned, and is nearly well this morning. He'll have to stand his trial, of course; and a good thing for him if they don't bring it in 'Wilful Murder'—for that's what some of these careless engine-drivers will come to one day."

The official spoke with a good deal of acrimony. If the blame did not lie with the driver, it lay with *him*, and some hot dispute had been going on already that morning.

"Does the driver deny that the red light was up?" asked Mr. Lake.

"He denies it, and stands to it," said the aggrieved station-master. "He says the green lights were up as usual. The man's a fool."

"He had taken something to obscure his vision, possibly?"

"Well, no. I don't think he had done that. He is a sober man. It is a case of carelessness: nothing else. They go driving on, full pelt, never looking at the signals. On these quiet lines of rail, where there's not much traffic, the danger signal is not exhibited for weeks together. They get accustomed to see the other, and it becomes to them so much a matter of course that it must be there, that they forget to look at it at all.

That, in my opinion, must have been the cause of last night's work, and I see no other possible way of accounting for it."

He turned back to the station as he spoke, and a gentleman, who had drawn near, held out his hand to greet the Lakes and the Jupps. It was Colonel West, an acquaintance who resided at Coombe Dalton.

"Oh, colonel," exclaimed one of the young ladies, "what a shocking accident this has been!"

"Ay, it has. Seven picked up dead, and four more gone this morning; besides legs, and arms, and backs broken. It is awful to think of."

"And all from one man's recklessness!" added Mr. Lake, with more severity, more feeling, than he generally suffered himself to display. "As the station-master says, they'll not be brought to their senses, these drivers, until some of them are convicted of wilful murder. I hope the man who drove the train last night will get his deserts."

The spectators generally, including Oliver Jupp, had strolled off in the wake of the station-master, he being the one from whom most news was to be expected, and their curiosity was craving for it. Colonel West, a keen, sensible

man of fifty, brought himself to an anchor before Mr. Lake, touching him on the waistcoat to command attention.

"Let me disabuse your mind, at any rate. I hear they are putting the blame on the driver; but he does not deserve it, and they must be doing it to screen themselves. I know nothing of the man; I never saw him in my life until this morning; but I shall stand between him and injustice."

"In what way? what do you mean?" Mr. Lake inquired.

"They say at the station here that they exhibited the danger signal, red, and that the train dashed on regardless of it," said Colonel West. "I went to the inn this morning where some of the wounded are lying, and there I found the driver—as they told me he was—on a mattress on the floor. 'How did this happen?' I said to him. 'I don't know how it happened, sir,' he replied; 'but I declare there was no red signal up to stop me; the green light was up as usual.' That was the first I had heard about the red light," continued the colonel; "but I find the man said true, and that the whole blame is laid upon him. Now it happens that I was in my garden last

night when the smash came, just over on the other side of the line, and I can bear the man's assertion out. It was the green light that was up, and not the red."

"Shameful!" exclaimed Mr. Lake, rising up at once against the injustice in his impulsive way. "I hope, colonel, you will stand by the man."

"You may be sure of that. I'd transport a reckless driver for life, if I could, but I would never see an innocent man falsely accused."

Having nothing to do with themselves, they strolled into the village, such as it was, the colonel with them. At the door of the small inn, whose floors had been put into requisition the previous night, on the green bench running under the windows, sat the driver of the engine, his head tied up with a white cloth and his arm in a sling. Colonel West introduced him: "Cooper, the driver." Cooper was a man of notoriety that day.

"Why, Cooper!" cried Mr. Lake in surprise the moment he saw the patient, "was it you who drove the engine last night?"

"Yes, sir, it was me," replied Cooper, standing up to answer, but sinking back at once from giddiness. "And I can only say I wish it had

been somebody else, if they are going to persist in accusing me of causing the accident wilfully."

Mr. Lake knew him well. He was a young man, a native of Katterley, of very humble origin, but of good natural intelligence and exemplary character. It was only about a month that he had been promoted to be a driver; before that he was a stoker. "I need not have speculated on whether the driver was overcome by strong liquor, had I known who it was," said Mr. Lake.

"He tells me he never drinks," interposed Colonel West.

"Never, sir," said Cooper. "Water, and tea, and coffee, and those sort of things, but nothing stronger. I had a brother, sir, who drank himself to death before he was twenty, and it was a warning for me. This gentleman and these ladies knew him."

Mr. Lake nodded acquiescence. "So they say the red light was up, do they, Cooper, and you would not see it?"

"I hear they are saying so at the station, sir; but it's very wrong. There was no other light up but the one that is generally up, the green. Should I have gone steaming on, risking death

to myself and my passengers, if the danger light had been up? No, sir, it's not likely."

"Did you look at the signal light?" inquired Mary Jupp, who was always practical. "Perhaps you—you *might*, you know, Cooper—have passed it without looking, just for once."

"I did look, miss; and I couldn't have been off seeing it last night, for it was being swung about like anything. 'What's up now,' I said to myself, 'that they are swinging the lamp about like that?' and I thought whoever it was doing it, must have had a drop too much."

"But don't you think you might from that very fact have suspected danger?" questioned Mr. Lake.

"No, sir, not from the green lamp. If they had wanted to warn me of danger, they should have swung the red. Any way, I'd rather have given my own life than it should have happened when I was driver."

"Cooper, I saw the green light swung as well as you; and I shall be happy to bear my testimony in your favour at the proper time and place," said Colonel West. "It is quite a providential thing that I happened to be in my garden at the time."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, earnestly, the tears of relief and emotion rising to his eyes.

Whiling away the time in the best way they could, they got back to the station a few minutes before the train for Guild was expected. The accident was the topic of conversation still.

"I have seen the driver," remarked Mr. Lake to the station-master. "I know him well, a sober, steady man. He persists still that the red signal was not exhibited; that it was the green."

"Oh, he does, does he?" returned the station-master. "He had better prove it. Of course, when they are at their wit's end for an excuse, they invent anything, probable or improbable."

"Cooper is not a man to invent. I am sure he is truthful."

"Let him wait till the inquest," was the significant reply.

The train came in, and they were taken on to Guild station. From thence they found their way to Mrs. Chester's, losing Oliver Jupp on the road.

"You disagreeable, tiresome things! what brings you here at this late hour?" was the greeting of Mrs. Chester, as she stood at the

door, in no amiable mood, to receive her guests. "You knew we were to have dined at three o'clock, and taken dessert and tea on the lawn. I have been obliged to order the dinner to be put back."

"It was the train's fault," said Mr. Lake. "It deposited us half-way and left us."

"Of course you must put in your nonsense, Robert, or it wouldn't be you," retorted Mrs. Chester, who could be objectionably cross when put out, especially to him. "Come along with me, girls, and take your things off. Dinner will be on the table in twenty minutes."

She led the way to the staircase with scant ceremony. Mr. Lake touched her arm.

"A moment, Penelope, just to answer me a question. Is Lydia Clapperton here to-day?"

"Yes," was Mrs. Chester's answer, delivered impatiently. "Why?"

"Where is she?"

"In the garden, I think—or perhaps with the children. What do you want to know for?"

"Only to get the start of Oliver. He monopolized her yesterday, I hear."

"Where *is* Oliver?" demanded Mrs. Chester, suddenly remembering that he had not come.

"Oh! he went into the town to buy cigars, or something of the sort," responded Mr. Lake, as he turned to the garden, glad perhaps to get out of the reach of his sister's anger. That something besides their late arrival had put out Mrs. Chester was self-evident.

Across lawns, over flower-beds, behind trees, went Robert Lake, in search of the beauty that to him was as yet a vision—Lydia Clapperton. Good chance—or ill chance, just as the reader may deem—took him to a small summer-house at the end of a shady shrubbery, and in it he discerned a lady sitting; young and pretty, he decided in the semi-light. The lattice was trellised with the green leaves of summer flowers; roses and clematis clustered at the door.

He thought, looking at her in the subdued shade, that she must be four or five-and-twenty. Her dress was young—young for daylight. A rich black silk with a low body and short sleeves, edged by a ruche of white crape, a jet chain on her white neck, and jet bracelets. She had very decided aquiline features, thin and compressed lips. Her eyes were such that would have been called beautiful or hideous, according to the taste or fancy of the spectator: they were large, bold,

and intensely black. Her hair *was* beautiful: a smooth purple black, very luxuriant, and disposed in an attractive manner round the head.

Mr. Lake took a private view through the interstices of the green stalks across the lattice.

"It is Lydia Clapperton," he said to himself; "and a fine girl!"

"There she is!" he began aloud, in his free and somewhat saucy manner—a manner that women like, when displayed by an attractive man—as he bared his head to enter the summer-house, and held out his hand with an *abandon* of all ceremony.

That she was surprised into the putting forth her hand in return, was indisputable. She had been intently bending over some fancy-work, netting; and she lifted her head with a start at the greeting, and let fall the work.

Mr. Lake took her hand; she looked up at him and saw a gay fascinating man, gentlemanly in the midst of his freedom. Drawing back her hand she sat down again, perfectly self-possessed.

"I told Mrs. Chester I should come and look for you," he said, in explanation. "I have the pleasure of knowing your sister, so we need not wait for a formal introduction."

"And you?" cried the lady, looking puzzled.

"You have heard, no doubt, of Mrs. Chester's brother, the scapegrace. She never gives me too good a word. I am out of her books again, through keeping her and the dinner waiting."

It happened that the young lady had never heard of Mr. Lake, as a scapegrace or otherwise. She did not say so, and went on with her netting work.

"Mrs. Chester has been wondering at the non-arrival of some friends she was expecting."

"And fuming at it too," returned Mr. Lake, with a light laugh. "We had an adventure. Getting out at Coombe Dalton in the supposition that there was plenty of time, the train went on without us. I am really sorry, though, for it has delayed your dinner."

"Oh! that is nothing," was the answer, spoken in a spirit of politeness. "I would rather not dine at all than dine alone."

Mr. Lake sat down on the bench, took up her scissors, and seemed inclined to make himself at home. She glanced at his bright blue eyes, dancing with light gaiety and with admiration of her fair self.

"I think nothing is more pleasant than a

country-house filled with visitors," she observed, tying a sudden break in the silk of her work, and holding out her hand for the scissors to cut the ends off.

"When they can do as they like," added Mr. Lake. "We shall remain until to-morrow night or Wednesday morning, I believe, and must make the most of it. And you—do you remain long?"

"My stay is quite uncertain."

"At least I hope you will be here until Wednesday. After that there'll be nothing to stay for; all the pleasure and the freedom must end; liberty will be replaced by restraint."

His tone had become serious. She paused again in her work, and lifted her eyes to speak.

"What restraint?"

"Mrs. Chester has sold her liberty to a Begum. Surely you must have heard of it! An old Indian Begum, who is coming to stay here, and takes possession the middle of the week. We must all be upon our good behaviour before her. No fun to go on then."

"An Indian Begum!" uttered the young lady, staring at him.

"Nothing less formidable, I assure you. She

is expected to make the journey from town on an elephant. I shall draw a sketch of her after dinner for private circulation: shawls, fans, woolly hair, and propriety. She's a widow; the relict of a Sir George Ellis; we must not so much as whisper before her."

The lady laughed.

"Mrs. Chester has laid down rules for our conduct," he went on, in a rattling sort of fashion. "The last time I was at Guild she saw me snatch a kiss from a pretty girl who was staying with her; and a few days ago she appeared at my house with an inquiry of what I supposed my Lady Ellis would think of such conduct. You have no conception what a nightmare this Begum is to me—this old relict of a K.C.B."

"Really I don't wonder. Shawls, fans, woolly hair, and an elephant! Old and ugly! Did you say ugly?"

"As if a Begum could be anything else! Not that her ugliness or beauty could affect one; but her interfering with the liberty of a fellow—that does it."

"But—according to your version—it is Mrs. Chester who seems to be interfering; not the Begum."

"It is all the same; excepting that, for Mrs. Chester we should not care, and for the Begum, I suppose, we must. I did think of getting a few days' fishing here this charming weather, but that's over now. I shall never stand that Begum—twirling one's thumbs before her, and speaking in measured monosyllables."

The young lady bent over her netting; she had made a long stitch. Glancing up, she saw those attractive eyes fastened on her. "Mrs. Chester seems to wish to keep you in order," she remarked, bending them again.

"She does. It is her vocation. I listen to her pretty dutifully, and when her back's turned have a good laugh over it. Allow me to try and get that knot undone for you; it is giving you trouble."

"Why, what do you know about netting?" she asked, gaily.

"A great deal. I netted a boy's fishing-net once. Those long stitches are the very plague."

"A fishing-net!" she laughed. "Well, perhaps you did; but what do you think you could do to this fine silk: you, with your man's fingers?"

"I can try, so as to save the trouble to you."

He bent as he spoke, and attempted gently to draw the work from her. She kept it tight. It really looked as though they had no objection, either of them, to lapse into a flirtation, when at that moment voices were heard, and Mr. Lake looked up. Passing across the shrubbery, by an intersecting walk, was Oliver Jupp, with a young lady by his side. She turned her head, and stood still for a moment, calling out to Mrs. Chester's children, who were behind, so that Mr. Lake had a view of her face.

"Who the deuce has Jupp picked up now?" murmured Mr. Lake, in a half-whisper. "She's an uncommon pretty girl." The lady also looked at them, letting her netting fall on her lap.

"Do you know who that young lady is?" he asked.

She disengaged the string from her foot, got up, and looked from the door. Mrs. Chester's children ran across the shrubbery with fleet feet and noisy tongues, and the sound of their voices faded away in the distance.

"It is a Miss Clapperton. Mrs. Chester introduced her to me by that name. Lydia Clapperton, I think, she called her."

Mr. Lake stared in his surprise. "*That* Lydia Clapperton!"

"Mrs. Chester certainly called her so."

"Why, then—who are you?"

"I? Oh, I am the Indian Begum; but I did not come on an elephant."

His pulses stood still for a moment. But he thought she was playing a joke upon him.

"You are not—you cannot be—Lady Ellis!"

"I am indeed. The old relict of Colonel Sir George Ellis, K.C.B."

Never in all his life had Robert Lake been so taken to, never had he felt more thoroughly confused and ashamed. The hot crimson mounted to his temples. Lady Ellis had sat down again, and was quietly going on with her work.

"I humbly beg your pardon, Lady Ellis," he said, standing before her as shame-faced as any convicted schoolboy. "I cannot expect you to accord it to me, but I most sincerely beg it."

"I think I must accord it to you," she answered, in a pretty tantalizing sort of manner. "Your offence was not against *me*, but against some fabled monster of your fancy. You shall

sketch her still after dinner for private circulation."

The sound of a gong as she spoke gave notice that dinner was ready. Mr. Lake held out his hand with hesitation.

"Will you ratify your pardon, Lady Ellis? Will you promise to forget as well as forgive? I shall never forget or forgive myself."

She frankly put her hand into his as she rose. "I have forgiven; I will promise to forget. But then, you know, you must not convert me into a nightmare."

"You a nightmare!" he impulsively cried, some of his old lightness returning to him. "If you are, it will be one of a different kind: a nightmare of attraction," he gallantly added, as he offered her his arm. "What did you think of me? Did you take me for a wild animal just arrived from the savage islands?"

"No," said Lady Ellis; "that is what you took the Begum for. I found you were under a mistake as soon as you spoke of my sister. I have no sister. But what about your intention of fishing here? I am sorry that I should frustrate it."

He bit his lip; he could not conceal his an-

noyance. "I thought you promised to forget," he softly whispered.

"And so I will."

"When did you arrive?"

"Only an hour or so ago. Just in time to dress for dinner."

Leaving Lady Ellis in the drawing-room, he ran upstairs in search of his wife, and found her in the chamber which had been assigned them—a pleasant room, looking towards the lawn. She was at work: making a doll's frock for Fanny Chester.

"How hot you look!" she exclaimed, as her husband entered. "Your face is crimson."

"My brain is also," he replied. "What do you think?—Lady Ellis is here."

"Mrs. Chester told us so. She had a note from her this morning, and she herself arrived at two o'clock."

"Clary, I called her the Begum to her face."

"Oh!"

"I don't know what else I didn't call her: old and ugly, and a nightmare; and said she was coming on an elephant. In short, I did nothing but ridicule her. You see, I took her for that Lydia Clapperton."

Mrs. Lake's face turned red in its turn. She was of a refined, deeply-sensitive temperament, ever considerate of the feelings of others.

"What apology can you possibly offer, Robert? How can you make your peace?"

"I have made it already. She seems thoroughly good-natured, and saw the thing as it was—a misapprehension altogether. I'd rather have given a hundred pounds, though, than it should have happened. Why couldn't Penelope open her mouth and tell me she had come and was in the garden?"

He was splashing away at the water, having turned up his cuffs and his wristbands to wash his hands, evidently not on very good terms with himself. His wife put the doll's frock into her little ornamental basket and stood up to wait, watching him brush his hair. Then they were ready to go down.

"Clara."

"What?" she asked, turning round to him.

"Don't speak of this to any one, my darling. It really has annoyed me. I do not suppose Lady Ellis will."

"Of course I will not." And he bent his hot face over his wife's, and kissed it by way of thanks.

"What is she like?" asked Clara.

"Young, and very good looking."

A knock at the door. Mr. Lake opened it. There stood a fair girl of fifteen or sixteen, with soft brown eyes and a pale gentle face. Her hair, of a bright chestnut-brown, was worn plain, and her voice and manners were remarkably sweet and gentle. It was Anna Chester, Mrs. Chester's step-daughter. There was a sort of patient weary look about the girl, as if she had long had to do battle with care; her black merino dress, rather shabby, was only relieved by a bit of quilled white net round the throat, and plain stitched linen bands at the wrists.

"Mr. Chester sent me to tell you that dinner is being taken in."

"We are ready for it. Here, Anna, wait a moment," added Mr. Lake, drawing her in and shutting the door. "What brings that Lady Ellis here? I thought she was not to come until Wednesday or Thursday."

"Neither was she," answered Anna. "It put us out very much this morning when we got her letter, because things were not ready. But we did the best we could."

"That accounts for Penelope's sharpness," re-

marked Mr. Lake. "But she could not have come from Cheltenham this morning, Anna!"

"No, from London. She left Cheltenham on Saturday, she told us, and wrote from London yesterday."

"Now then, you people!" called out Mrs. Chester's voice from the foot of the stairs.

"Come along, Anna," said Mr. Lake.

"Oh, I am not going to dine with you," was the girl's answer. "There would be nobody to see that things went in properly, and to wash the forks and spoons."

For Mrs. Chester had not sufficient forks and spoons to serve for all her courses without washing. The dinner was made more elaborate than it need have been, in honour of the first appearance of Lady Ellis at table. Anna Chester spoke cheerfully, with patient meekness, as if it were her province to be put upon; and Robert Lake muttered an angry word in his wife's ear about Mrs. Chester's selfishness.

In the corridor they encountered Mary and Margaret Jupp, and all descended together. The party was going into the dining-room; Mrs. Chester had momentarily disappeared; Oliver was laughing with Lydia Clapperton; Mr. Lake went

up to him and claimed to be introduced; the Miss Jupps seized upon Lady Ellis with greetings and reminiscences of old times; and altogether there was some confusion. Clara Lake, naturally retiring, slipped into the dining-room behind the rest, and took her seat unobtrusively by the side of Fanny Chester. So that it happened she was not introduced to Lady Ellis. That Indian widow, casting her roving eyes around, heard her called "Clara" once or twice by Mrs. Chester, and took her for the governess. A young curate in a straight coat down to his heels, made the tenth at table.

"Mamma said I was to dine here," whispered Fanny, confidentially to Mrs. Lake, "or else there would have been an odd number."

Mr. Lake took the foot of the table, and had Lady Ellis on his right. They talked together a great deal. Altogether it was a very social dinner, plenty of laughing. Anna Chester washed up spoons and forks outside the door, kept the little boys in order, and saw to things generally.

Dinner over, they went on the lawn, where a table was set out with wine and fruit and cakes. But none of them seemed inclined to sit down to it at first; preferring to disperse in groups,

and flit about amidst the walks and flowers. Oliver Jupp appropriated Lydia Clapperton, and Mr. Lake was perfectly content that it should be so. For himself he was everywhere; now with Mary Jupp; now with Margaret; now with his sister; and now, and now, and now with Lady Ellis. Chiefly with her: and she by no means objected to the companionship. In short it was a delightful, unceremonious, laisser-aller sort of gathering, with Mrs. Chester seated in her weeds to play propriety, whilst her young boys, left to themselves, got into as much mischief as they possibly could.

"And so you found yourself restless at Cheltenham?" remarked Mr. Lake, as he and Lady Ellis emerged once more in the open ground from some one of the many side walks.

"I get restless everywhere. India suited me best. It may be different, perhaps, when once I settle down."

"I never saw Cheltenham. It is a charming place, according to report."

"At this season it is nothing but heat and dust. I did intend to stay there until the middle of this week; but I couldn't do it. I could not, Mr. Lake. So I went up to London on Satur-

day night, and wrote word to your sister that she must expect me on Monday."

They were crossing the lawn. Seated now near Mrs. Chester, at the table, was Clara Lake, who had been beguiled indoors by Fanny Chester to the doll's frock. That important work being accomplished, Clara had come out again. Lady Ellis—her black lace shawl draped artistically round her shoulders, and her very brilliant black eyes darting their glances here and there, fixed their light upon Clara.

"Who *is* that young lady, Mr. Lake?"

He looked surprised, and then smiled. "Don't you know?"

"I don't know who she is. I know that she is one of the very boldest girls I ever saw."

"*She* bold!" returned Mr. Lake, in marked astonishment, while a flush darkened his cheek. "You are mistaken, Lady Ellis."

"Bold; and unseemly bold," repeated Lady Ellis. "I speak of that young lady who is now sitting by Mrs. Chester. Some of them called her 'Clara' at dinner. I thought she might be the governess, but she seems to take too much upon herself for that."

"I understand of whom you speak. But why do you call her bold?"

Lady Ellis was silent for a moment, and then lifted her head. "When we have lived in India, have travelled—in short, have rubbed off the reserve and rusticity which experience of the world only can effect, we like to speak out our opinion, and call things by their right names. Half an hour ago you were with her in that walk, talking to her; she held your arm, and she suddenly clasped her other hand over it, and kept it there, turning her face up to yours with what looked very like ardent admiration. It struck me as being not—not seemly."

Mr. Lake coughed down a laugh. "She has a legal right to look in my face as ardently as she pleases: and you may fully believe me when I assure you that from her you will never witness aught unseemly. That young lady is my wife."

"Your — wife!" echoed Lady Ellis, taken utterly by surprise.

"My own wife." His saucy blue eyes gazed into those amazed black ones, enjoying their confusion with an exceedingly saucy expression. Lady Ellis burst into a laugh.

"Well, I suppose I must beg your pardon now. We all seem to be letting ourselves in for mistakes and blunders. I thought she was a young girl, and I did not know you were married."

"She does look young," he answered, his eyes following his wife's pretty figure, as she went towards the house with Mrs. Chester; "nevertheless she has been my wife these three years."

"You must have married early. Is it wise, think you, of a man to do so?"

"Wise?—In what respect?"

"Repentance might come. Men scarcely know their own minds before thirty."

"A great many of us risk it."

They sat down at the dessert-table, and Mr. Lake helped her to some wine and fruit. One of the little boys ran up and clamoured for good things in the absence of his mother. Lady Ellis privately thought that children did not improve the social relations of the world.

Mrs. Chester had taken Clara to look at what she called the domestic arrangements, which in reality meant the kitchens and back premises in general. Encountering Miss Jupp as they went, she turned to accompany them.

"Had you come at the time you ought, I should have shown you over the house before dinner," grumbled Mrs. Chester, who could not forget the upsetting of her plans.

"Of course we were very sorry," spoke Mary Jupp. "It is so tiresome to put back one's dinner after it is at the fire. I should have been more cross than you, Mrs. Chester."

"What with one thing and another, I have been cross enough to-day," confessed Mrs. Chester, giving a jerk to her widow's cap, which never kept on two minutes together, wanting strings. "First of all, this morning, came Lady Ellis's letter to upset me, and with nothing ready for her!"

"Why did she come to-day?"

"Some whim, I suppose. It was a courteous letter of excuse—hoping I should pardon her, and begging me not to treat her as a stranger. How very handsome she is!"

"Her features are handsome," rejoined Mary Jupp; "but their expression's bad."

"Bad!" cried Mrs. Chester.

"I think so. There's nothing good or kind in them; and she's eaten up alive with vanity. You must take care of your hus-

band, Clara, for she seems to covet his admiration."

Clara Lake, who was in advance, looked back and laughed merrily.

"How can you put such notions in her head?" spoke Mrs. Chester, severely. "Robert Lake's manners with women are in the highest degree absurd; but there's no need for his wife to be reminded of it to her face."

"I don't mind being reminded of it, Mrs. Chester. It means nothing."

"Of course it does not. I only hope Lady Ellis will not take offence at him. What age is she, I wonder—five-and-twenty?"

"Five-and-thirty, if she's a day!" spoke Mary Ann Jupp, in her strong decision. "She is made-up, you know—cosmetics and that, and dresses to look young. But just look quietly at her when the sun is on her face."

"But she cannot be that age."

"I think she is. I will ask mamma when I get home: she knows."

The subject dropped. Mrs. Chester took them round the house, and in at the back door, showing one thing, explaining another. The larder and the dairy were first entered.

"That is what was once the dairy," observed Mrs. Chester. "Of course, I want nothing of the sort, not possessing cows. It will do to keep herbs and pots and pans in. This is the kitchen," she continued, turning into a large, convenient room on the right of the boarded passage.

"Why, it is like print!" exclaimed Mary Jupp, in her hasty way. "There's not a speck of dirt about it; everything is in its place. How in the world have they got it into this order so soon after dinner?"

"This is the best kitchen," explained Mrs. Chester; "they cook in the other. Don't you see that there's no fire? We shall use this in winter, but while the weather is so hot, I like the cooking done as far from the sitting-rooms as possible. Farm-houses generally have two kitchens, you know. The other is in the yard. You can come and see it."

They went out of the room, but Clara did not. She stood rooted to the spot, like one in a trance, rather than a living, breathing woman. She glanced here, she glanced there; at the doors, the large window, the fireplace; at the furniture, and position of everything. Her breathing came

softly; she pressed her brow to make sure she was awake.

Mrs. Chester and Mary Jupp came back, and she had not stirred: her cheek was pale, her hands were clasped, she looked very like a statue. Mrs. Chester began explaining where the several doors led to: one down to the cellar, one to the coal-house, one to the dairy, and one to a china closet; four in all, besides the entrance door. Both of them were too busy to notice her.

"Are you coming, Clara?" asked Miss Jupp, as they went out.

"Directly," she replied, speaking quietly. "Mary, I wish you would find my husband, and tell him I want him here for a minute."

"You want to show him what a model place it is," cried Mrs. Chester, complacently. "Do so, Clara. *He* will never have such a kitchen in his house."

Mary Jupp delivered the message to Mr. Lake, who was still at the table, and peeling a pear for Lady Ellis. The objectionable boy had disappeared. He came away when he had finished his job, leaving the two ladies together. Mrs. Chester had hastened in dire wrath after the other of her mischievous young sons, who was

climbing up a prickly tree, to the detriment of his clothes.

"I had no idea until just now that Mr. Lake was a married man," observed Lady Ellis to Mary Jupp, as she leisurely eat her pear.

"No! Then whom did you suppose Mrs. Lake was?"

"I did not suppose anything about it; I did not know she was Mrs. Lake. Have they been married long?"

"About three years."

"Ah, yes; I think he said so. Any children?"

"There was one. A beautiful little child; but it died. Do you not think her very lovely? It is so sweet a face!"

Lady Ellis shrugged her shoulders. "She has no style. And she seems as much wrapt up in her husband as though they had been married yesterday."

"Why should she not be?" bluntly asked Miss Jupp. "I only hope when I am married—if ever that's to be—that I and my husband shall be as happy and united as they are."

"As *she* is," spoke Lady Ellis. "I would not answer for him."

Mary Jupp felt cross. It occurred to her that

somebody might have been whispering tales about Mr. Lake's nonsensical flirtation with her sister Rose: and purely innocent nonsense, on both sides, she knew that to be. "Young Lake is one of those men who cannot live without flirtation," she observed, "who admire every woman they meet, and take care to let her know it. His wife can afford to laugh at it, knowing that his love is exclusively hers."

Lady Ellis drew down the corners of her mouth and coughed a little cough of mocking disbelief; for which Mary Jupp, upright and high-principled, could have scolded her for an hour.

"So very old-fashioned, those notions, my dear Miss Jupp. Love!"

"Old-fashioned, are they?" fired Mary.

"A woman hazards more than she perhaps bargains for, when she ties herself, for better or for worse, to one of these attractive men: but of course she must put up with the consequences."

"What consequences?" exclaimed Mary Jupp, feeling herself puzzled by the speech altogether.

"The seeing herself a neglected wife: the seeing others preferred before her—as she must

inevitably do when her own short reign is over."

"Had you to experience that?" sharply asked Mary Jupp, intending the question as a sting.

"I!" equably returned Lady Ellis. "My husband had nothing attractive about him, and was as old as Adam. I spoke of the wives of fascinating men: others may humdrum on to their graves, and be at peace."

"I don't see what there is to fascinate in young Lake. He is light-headed and careless, if that means fascination."

"Ah," superciliously remarked Lady Ellis, playing with her jet chain.

They were interrupted by Margaret Jupp, who came up with Mrs. Chester. The young lady, hearing of the expedition to the kitchens, was not pleased to have been omitted, so Mrs. Chester was going to do the honours again.

"I think there's nothing so nice as looking over a house," said Margaret. "Kitchens have great interest for me."

"I suppose I may not ask to be of the party?" interposed Lady Ellis, looking at Mrs. Chester.

"Certainly you may: why not?" And they

slowly strolled across the lawn on the expedition.

Meanwhile Mr. Lake, in obedience to the summons, had found his wife in the large kitchen. She was still standing in the middle of the floor, just as though she had been glued to it.

"Did you want me, Clara?"

"Do come here," she whispered, in quite an awe-struck tone. And Mr. Lake, wondering a little, stepped up and stood beside her. Clara, touching his arm, pointed to different features of the room, turning about to do it.

"Do you see them, Robert? Do you remember?"

"I have not been in the kitchen before," was his answer, after a pause, looking curiously at the room and then at her.

"It is the kitchen of my dream!"

"The what?" exclaimed Mr. Lake.

"The kitchen I saw in my dream."

He barely stopped an irreverent laugh. What he saw upon her face arrested it.

"It is," she whispered, her voice sounding strangely hollow, as though some great physical change had taken place within. "I described its features to you that night, and now you may

see them. We—we are standing in the same position!" she burst forth more eagerly, as if the fact had but that moment occurred to her. "See! I was here, you on that side me, as you are now; here was the small round dark table close to us; there is the large window, with the ironing-board underneath it; there, to the left, are the dresser and the shelves, and even the very plates and dishes upon them——"

"Of the precise willow pattern," put in Mr. Lake.

"There, behind us, is the fireplace; and around are the several doors, in the very self-same places that I saw them," she continued, too eager to notice or heed the mocking interruption. "I told you it looked like a farm-house kitchen, large and bleak: you may see that it does, now."

"I shall begin to think that you are dreaming still," he returned.

"I wish I was! I wish I had never seen in reality the kitchen of that dream. I did not at the first moment recognise it. When I came in with Mrs. Chester and Mary Jupp, the place struck me as being familiar, and I was just going to say to them, 'I must have been here before,'

when my dream flashed upon me, like a chill. I felt awe-struck—sick; I feel so yet."

"This beats spirit-rapping," said Mr. Lake. "Let us lay hold of the table, and see whether it won't turn."

"*Why* will you turn it into mockery?" she resumed, her tone one of sharp pain. "You know that dream seemed to foretel my death."

"I declare to goodness, Clara, you will make me angry!" was his retort, his voice changing to severity. "What has come over you these last few days?"

"That dream has come over me," she replied, with a shiver. "I thought it was done with; done with by the accident of last night; and now the sight of this kitchen has renewed it in all its horror. If you could, only for one minute, feel as I am feeling, you would not wonder at me."

Her state of mind appeared to him most unaccountable: not foolish; that was not the word; far worse than foolish—obstinate and unreasonable. Never in his life had he spoken so sharply to her as he spoke now. Perhaps his recent intercourse with that equable woman of the world, Sir George's relict, had given him new ideas. "I should be sorry to feel it, even for a

minute; I should be ashamed to do so: and I feel ashamed for you. What did you want with me?"

"To show you the kitchen. To tell you this."

He gave vent to an impatient word, and turned angrily to the door. She, her heart bursting, went forward to the window. Just so had it been in the dream; just so had they seemed to part, he going to the door and she to the window; just so had been her sharp conviction of coming evil. Mr. Lake looked back at her; she had laid her head against the wall near the window: her hands drooped down; in her whole air there was an utter agony of abandonment. His better nature returned to him, and he walked across the kitchen. As he drew her face from the wall he saw that it was white, and the tears were running down her cheeks.

"Clara," he exclaimed, as he took her to himself, "must I treat you and soothe you as I would a child?"

"No, treat me as your wife," she passionately answered, breaking into a storm of sobs.

He suffered her to sob for a few moments, until the paroxysm had spent itself, and then

spoke; in a tone of remonstrance, it is true, but with deep tenderness. "Is it possible that you can allow a foolish superstition, a dream, to cause this wild grief?"

"It is not the dream that is causing the *grief*. You are causing that: you never so spoke to me: when I said it might foretel my death, you turned my words into ridicule. It is as if you do not care whether I live or die."

"Clara, you know better. What can I do for you? How can I soothe you?"

"Do not speak to me in that tone again."

"My dearest, I will do anything you wish in reason; you know I will, but you must not ask me to put faith in a dream. And if my voice sounded harsh—why, it would vex any man to find his wife so fóolish."

"Well, well, it shall pass; I will not vex you with it again. If any ill does come, it must; and if not——"

"If not, you will acknowledge what a silly child you have been," he interrupted, kissing the scalding tears from her face.

"Silly, and superstitious, if you will," she whispered, "but not a child. I think I am less a child at heart than many who are older.

Robert, if you ever grew unkind to me, I should die."

"That I never shall, my darling."

Standing outside the half-open door, taking a leisurely survey through the chink, was Lady Ellis, having come noiselessly along the passage matting; not purposely to deceive, she was not aware there was anything to see, but her footsteps were soft, her movements had mostly something cat-like about them. She saw his face bent on his wife's, and heard his kisses, all but heard his sweet words; heard quite enough to imagine them. An ugly look of envy, or something akin to it, rose momentarily to her pale features. Legitimate love such as this had never been hers. Mr. Lake was what she had called him, an attractive man. He had that day paid her attentions, said sentimental nothings to her in a low voice; and there are some women who would fain keep such men to themselves, whether they may have wives or not; nay, their having a wife is only an inducement the more. Was Lady Ellis one?

The smile changed its character for that of mockery. It flashed into my lady's mind that this little domestic scene was one of reconcilia-

tion after dispute, and that the dispute must have had its natural rise in those recent attentions paid to herself. The voices of Mrs. Chester and Margaret Jupp were heard approaching, and she made her safe way back to them.

"Let it pass, let it pass, Clara," Mr. Lake said hastily to his wife, hearing the voices also. "My dear, there is no *reason* in your fear. What harm do you suppose can arise from your visit here? There is no chance of a breakdown again as we go home."

"It is just that—that I cannot see any probability of harm. But I gave you my word just now to say no more about the matter, and I will keep it."

"Come and walk in the air, it will do you good. Your eyes are as red as if you had been crying for a day, Clara."

Lady Ellis pushed the door open and came in, followed by the others. Mrs. Chester began expatiating upon the conveniences of the kitchen, its closets and cupboards, and Mr. Lake and his wife slipped away. My lady, looking from the window, saw him pass it towards the kitchen garden, his wife upon his arm.

CHAPTER V.

RED, OR GREEN?

THE inquest on those killed by the railway accident took place on the Tuesday morning. Numbers were attracted to the spot, impatient to hear the evidence. Reports had been busy as to the conflicting nature of the testimony expected to be given, and excitement was at its height. While one party openly asserted that Cooper, the driver, was falsely trying to "whiten" himself, and so avoid punishment for his carelessness; the station-master was less loudly accused of having been the one in fault, and with "taking away the man's character."

Amidst the crowd, meeting at Coombe Dalton, were Mr. Lake and Oliver Jupp: the one went from Guild, the other from Katterley. Oliver Jupp, with his sisters, said adieu to Mrs. Chester on the Monday evening, and returned home:

Mr. Lake and his wife stayed at Guild. Curiosity or interest in the proceedings, or opposition in their own opinions, took them both. Mr. Lake felt certain that Cooper spoke truth in saying the green light was exhibited, not the red; would have been ready to stake his life upon it. Oliver Jupp, relying upon his own eyesight, upheld the side of the station-master. Each one had maintained tenaciously his own opinion when discussing the affair at Mrs. Chester's; and they would not have missed the inquest for the world.

In the largest room that the small inn at Coombe Dalton could afford, the coroner and jury assembled, and proceedings commenced. About the cause of death there could be no doubt; and it needed not the testimony of old Dr. Marlow, of Katterley, who had been the first doctor to arrive at the spot on the Sunday night, to prove it. However, the requirements of law must be obeyed, and he was there with sundry of his brethren. Next came the evidence as to the cause of the accident.

The station-master, one porter, and a "switchman," comprised the officials who had been at the station on the Sunday night. They all gave

their testimony in a very positive and unequivocal manner: that the red lights were exhibited to give warning of danger, and that the train, in reckless defiance of the red, came dashing on, and so caused the catastrophe.

"What was the danger?" officially inquired the coroner.

"Some trucks were on the line just beyond the station, and had to be shunted," replied the station-master. "Three minutes would have done it; and the train would not have been kept waiting longer than that, had it only stopped."

"What brought the trucks on the line just as the train was expected to pass?"

"They couldn't be shunted before, because the coal waggons were in the way."

"Why were the coal waggons there just then?"

"Because an engine had gone on and left them there."

And so on; and so on—engine, and coal waggons, and shunting, and trucks. It was like "the house that Jack built." Nobody had been in fault, apparently, or done anything wrong, except the miserable train that had dashed on to its

destruction, and its still more miserable driver, Matthew Cooper.

Cooper came forward and asked leave to give his evidence. The coroner cautioned him; he thought he had better not; it might be used against him. But Cooper persisted; and he stood there to say what he had to say, his pale face, surrounded by its bandages, earnest and anxious.

"I'll say nothing but the truth, sir. If that is to be used against me, why I can't help it. I'd not tell a lie even to screen myself."

He took his own course, and gave his evidence. It was to the effect that the green lights were exhibited as usual that night, not the red. The coroner felt a little staggered. He knew Cooper to be a steady, reliable, truth-telling man. One of the witnesses observed, as if in continuation of what Cooper had just said, that "Mat Cooper wouldn't tell a lie to screen himself from nothing." The coroner had hitherto believed the same.

"Did you look at the lights?" he asked of Cooper.

"I looked at both, sir. The lamp that was at the near end of the station, and the lamp on the signal-post beyond it."

"And you say they were the green lights?"

"That they were, sir. The same green lights that are always up. He had taken the light off the post, and was swaying it about, and I couldn't conceive what he was doing it for."

"But here are three witnesses, the station-master and the two men, who have sworn that the red signals were up, and not the green," persisted the coroner. "It is very strange that you should maintain the contrary."

"The three may be in a league together to say so, and hide their own negligence," audibly interposed the voice of some zealous partisan from the most crowded part of the room. Upon which the coroner threatened to commit anybody so interrupting, for contempt of himself and the court.

"All I can say is, sir, that there was no difference, that night, in the lights from those exhibited on other nights," returned Cooper. "They were the green lights, and not the red; and if I had to die next minute, I'd say it."

Which was altogether unsatisfactory to the coroner and puzzling to the jury. Most of them knew Cooper well, and would have trusted him; his voice and face, now as he spoke, bore their

own testimony to his truth. On the other side, the three station people, who were not to be discredited, gave him the lie direct.

"Did you see the red light swung about?" continued the coroner.

"No, sir. I saw the green; and I couldn't think what it was being swung about for."

Cooper held to this, and nothing more could be got from him—that is, nothing to a different effect. He would have descanted on its being the green light until night, had the coroner allowed him. When he was done with, a gentleman presented himself for examination. It was Colonel West.

"Can you state anything about this matter, Colonel?" asked the coroner, when he had exchanged bows with the voluntary witness.

"Yes, I can, if you will allow me to be sworn."

And sworn he was.

"In anxiety to see justice done to the driver, I have come here to offer my testimony," began the colonel, addressing the coroner and jury. "I am enabled to state that the light exhibited on the signal-post, and which the man took down and swayed about, was green. When the driver

asserts that it was not red, he speaks the truth."

Some excitement. The coroner drew in his lips, the jury put their heads together. Colonel West stood bolt upright, waiting to be questioned.

"Were you at the station?" inquired the coroner of the witness.

"No; I was in my garden, which is precisely opposite the signal-post on the other side of the line. I was walking about in it, smoking a cigar. I heard the train approaching, and I saw the man take the lamp off the post, lean forward, and swing it about, evidently to attract attention. A minute afterwards the accident happened."

"And you say this was not the red light?"

"It was not. It was the light that is generally up, the green."

The coroner gave an expressive look at the station-master, which spoke volumes, and the latter looked red and indignant. Colonel West reiterated his assertion, as if willing that all should be impressed with the truth, and with the injustice attempted to be dealt to Cooper. Then he stood down.

There ensued a commotion: at least, if numerous tongues can constitute it. The coroner interposed to stop it and restore order. When the noise had subsided, Oliver Jupp was standing by the table in Colonel West's place. One of the jury inquired of him why he was put forward.

"I don't know," returned Oliver. "Somebody pushed me up. I happened to mention that I saw the light in question exhibited and swayed about: I suppose it is for that."

"Oh, you saw it, did you," said the coroner. "Swear this witness."

Oliver Jupp took the oath accordingly, and the coroner began.

"Which light was it, the red or the green?"

"The red."

There was a pause. Perhaps more than one present thought of the old fable of the chameleon. The room fixed its eyes on Oliver Jupp.

"From whence did you see it?" demanded the coroner.

"I was in the train returning from Guild. As we got to Coombe Dalton station I looked out at the window, and saw a red light being waved about. I remarked it to my sisters, who were in

the carriage with me, and one of them observed that if it was the red light there must be danger. The accident occurred almost as she spoke."

"Are you sure it was the red light, sir?" inquired one of the jury, all of whom had been so particularly impressed with Colonel West's evidence.

"Certain."

"And of course he could have no motive in saying anything but the truth," remarked the juryman to another, who seemed in a state of perplexity.

"I a motive!" haughtily observed Oliver, taking up the words. "I am put here simply to state what I saw, I expect; neither more nor less. I am sorry to give evidence that may tell against Cooper, who is respected in Katterley, but I am bound to say that it was the red light."

"Don't you think you might have been mistaken, sir?" came the next query; for Oliver Jupp's word, a young and little man, bore less weight than Colonel West's, who counted five-and-fifty years, and stood six feet two in his stockings.

"I was not mistaken. It was the red light."

Colonel West was recalled. What else could they do in the dilemma? He stood forward, and Oliver Jupp hid his head amid the ignoble crowd close behind.

With an apology for the apparent doubt, the same question was put to him. Did he think *he* could have been mistaken in supposing the light was the green.

"Not a bit of it," the colonel answered, with good-humoured equanimity. The lights exhibited that night were the same that always were exhibited—green. The light he saw swayed about was the green.

"Well," exclaimed the coroner, "there's hard swearing somewhere."

And hard swearing there certainly appeared to be. As a spectator audibly remarked, "one could not find an end out of it." The coroner got impatient.

"It is impossible at the present stage to come to any satisfactory conclusion, gentlemen of the jury," he observed; "and I think we had better adjourn the inquiry, when other witnesses may be forthcoming."

Adjourned it was accordingly for a fortnight.

"But for Colonel West they'd have had

it all against me," remarked Cooper, who was feeling himself wronged.

"But for Colonel West there'd have been no further bother," cried the aggrieved station-master, who thought Cooper ought to have been committed for trial on the spot.

It was certainly singular that the only two witnesses, apart from those interested, should testify so positively in exact opposition to each other. As the spectators poured out of the inquest-room, they formed into knots to discuss it. Neither the one nor the other had any interest to favour the station people or to screen Cooper; and, indeed, both were above suspicion of anything of the sort. Colonel West had never before heard of Cooper; Oliver Jupp knew him, and was evidently sorry to give evidence against him. On the other hand, Oliver Jupp did not know the station-master, while Colonel West was friendly with him.

"Will you go back with me to Guild, and stay the rest of the day?" asked Mr. Lake, putting his arm within Oliver Jupp's.

"Can't," returned Oliver. "Promised them at home to get back with the verdict as soon as it was over."

"But there is no verdict."

"All the same; they'll want to know the why and the wherefore."

"As if you could not keep the girls waiting for once!"

"It's not the girls, it's the old folks; and Guild has no charms for me to-day. Lydia Clapperton's gone."

Mr. Lake laughed. "I say, Jupp, how could you swear so hard about the lights?"

"They swore me. I didn't ask for it."

"I mean against Cooper."

"You would not have me say the light was green when it was red?"

"Colonel West says it was green; he was close to it."

"Moonshine," quietly repeated Oliver. "What on earth causes him to say it I can't make out. Look there"—holding out the end of the cigar he had lighted, and was smoking—"what colour do you call that?"

"Red. All the world could tell that."

"Why don't you say it's green?"

"Because it is not green."

"Just so. Neither was the red lamp."

"Cooper is a reliable man; I don't believe the

poor fellow would tell a lie to save himself from hanging; and Colonel West is of known honour; both of them assert that the lights were green."

"I swear that the light exhibited and swung about was *red*," retorted Oliver Jupp. "There; let it drop. Are you and Mrs. Lake coming home to-night?"

"No. It was uncertain what time I might reach Guild after the inquest, and Mrs. Chester seized upon it as a plea for urging us to remain another night. She wants us to stay for the week, but I don't think we shall. Clara seems rather averse to it."

They parted at the station. Oliver Jupp taking the train for Katterley: and with him we have nothing more to do at present. Mr. Lake got into the train for Guild.

Upon arriving at Mrs. Chester's he found the house empty. Going from room to room in search of them, he at length came upon Anna Chester, mending socks and pinafores.

"Where are they all?"

"I think they have gone to see the late rose show," she said; "there's one in the town to-day."

He stood by while she folded some pinafores

she had finished. Her hands were quick; her sweet face was full of patient gentleness.

"It is not the right thing for you, Anna."

"It is pleasant work. I have been obliged to be useful all my life, you know."

"I don't mean that. Why should you be left at home, while they all go to a flower-show?"

A bloom, bright as any rose in the famous show, shone in the girl's cheeks. She loved flowers, and looked up with a happy expression.

"Perhaps time will be found for me to go to-morrow; mamma said so. It will be only sixpence then."

"And to-day it's a shilling, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Mr. Lake nodded his head once or twice in a rather marked manner, but did not give utterance to his thoughts, whatever they might be. Anna resumed.

"I do all the work I can—of sewing and other kinds. It has cost mamma so much to get into this house, with the new things she has been obliged to buy, that she says she is nearly ruined. With Lady Ellis here, and only two servants, we could not get along at all but for my looking to everything."

Mr. Lake went off muttering something about Penelope's selfishness. That Anna was put upon quite like another Cinderella he had long known, and his sense of fairness rose up against it.

"If the girl was a tyrant she'd not have stood it for a day," he cried, as he flung himself down on a bench and raked the gravel with his cane. "A meek temper is a misfortune."

A short while, and he heard the keys of the piano touched in the drawing-room; a soft, sweet, musical voice broke out gently in song. He knew it for Anna's. She had finished her work, and was snatching a moment for music, having come in to get the table ready for tea. The open piano tempted her. Mr. Lake listened through the song—an old one; and put his head in at the window as she was rising.

"Sing another for me, Anna."

She started round with a blush. To believe you are singing for yourself, and then to find you have an audience, is not agreeable.

"Oh, Mr. Lake! I did not know you were there."

"Just another, Anna."

"I cannot sing for you. I know only old songs."

"They are better than the new ones. The one you have just sung, 'Ye banks and braes,' is worth any ten that have been issued of late years."

"I feel quite ashamed to sing them before people; I am laughed at when I do. Lady Ellis stopped her ears this morning. Papa loved the old songs, and he did not care that I should sing new ones; so I never learnt any."

He took up a book of music much worn, "Old songs," as Anna called them. Her mother used to sing them in her youth, and the Reverend James Chester had learnt to love them. "Robin Adair," "The Banks of Allan Water," "Pray Goody," "The Baron of Mowbray," "She never blamed him," "The Minstrel-boy," and many others.

It was in his hand, and Anna stood looking over his shoulder, laughing at what Mrs. Chester sometimes called the "ancient bygones." On the table lay a drawing that Anna had done, betraying talent; the more especially when it was remembered that she could never sit to that, or anything else, for five minutes at a time. Up and down continually: called by Mrs. Chester, called by the children, called by the servants.

She had never had a lesson in drawing in her life, she had never learnt to sing; what she did do was the result of native aptitude for it.

Mr. Lake had the drawing in his hand when the party entered, trooping in unceremoniously through the window, the children first. Lady Ellis's black-lace shawl was draped around her in its usual artistic fashion, and she wore a bonnet that could not by any stretch of imaginative politeness be construed into a widow's. Clara was with her, her refined face bright and radiant. The two were evidently on good terms with each other.

Mrs. Chester did not enter with them. Her household cares worried her, now that things must wear a good appearance for the new inmate, Lady Ellis. She came in presently from the hall, a cross look on her face, and spoke sharply to Anna. Selfish naturally, made intensely so by her struggle to get along, Mrs. Chester appeared to think that for her stepdaughter to be in the drawing-room and not in the kitchen, though it were but for a few minutes in the day, was a heinous crime.

"Robert," she said, addressing her brother, "I

wish you'd come up to my room while I take my bonnet off. I have a letter to show you."

He followed her dutifully, just as he used when he was a little boy and she a woman grown. Mrs. Chester's room, which she shared with Fanny, was small and inconvenient. Sweeping a host of things off a chair to the floor in her untidy way, she graciously told him he might sit there, but he preferred to perch himself on a corner of the dressing-table.

"I'm torn to pieces with indecision and uncertainty," she began, taking a letter from a drawer. "I begin to think now it might have been better had I adhered to my first thought—that of taking pupils. Only look at the thing I have missed!"

He held out his hand for the letter, which she struck as she spoke. In her dictatorial manner she preferred to read it to him, and waved his hand away.

"The Red Court Farm, Coastdown.

"MADAM,

"I have been advised to write to you by my friends here, Captain and Mrs. Copp. They think you are making arrangements to receive half-a-dozen first-class pupils to educate with

your own daughter. I am in search of something of the sort for my daughter, Miss Thornycroft, and it is possible that your house may be found suitable. She will require the best advantages, for which I shall expect to pay accordingly.

"With your permission I will drive over one of these first days and see you.

"And I am, madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"HARRY THORNYCROFT.

"Mrs. Chester."

"Who is Harry Thornycroft?" were Mr. Lake's first words when her voice ceased.

"I should have been as much at fault to know as you, but for a note Anna has had from Mrs. Copp, giving a little explanation. Mr. Thornycroft is the great man of Coastdown, it seems; a county magistrate, very influential, and very rich. Mrs. Copp thinks he would pay quite two hundred a year with his daughter."

"And Mrs. Copp—who is she?" repeated Mr. Lake. "And where in the name of geography is Coastdown?"

"We shall never get on if you bother like this,"

returned Mrs. Chester, irascibly. "Mrs. Copp and Anna's mother were related; and Coastdown is a little place on the sea, about two-and-twenty miles from here. Only fancy—only *think*—two hundred a year with the first pupil! If I only got three others at the same terms there'd be eight hundred a year at once—a thousand with my own income. It would be quite delightful."

"But that's reckoning your chickens before they are hatched."

"I might have known that you'd throw some mocking slight upon it," was the angry retort.

"No mocking slight at all, Penelope. I do not mean it as such. Of course, if you could get four or six pupils at two hundred a year each, it would be a jolly good thing. Only—I fancy pupils on those terms are not so readily picked up."

"*One*, at any rate, seems ready to drop into my hands. Should Miss Thornycroft not be placed with me after this, I shall look upon life as very hard."

"Can't you take her, should they offer her to you, and trust to good luck for finding others?"

"Then what am I to do about Lady Ellis?"

"Keep her also, if she will stay."

"But she would not. I sounded her this morning. Not as if I had a personal interest in the question. Anything like a school was her especial abhorrence, she said. She'd not enter a house where teaching was carried on for the world."

"So that you have to choose between the young lady with her two hundred a year and Lady Ellis?"

"In a sense, yes. But I have a difficult game to play. It strikes me that at the very first mention of a *probable* pupil Lady Ellis would take fright and leave. Now, you know, Robert, I have not got Miss Thornycroft yet, or even the promise of her; and it might happen that the negotiation would drop through. Where should I be in that case, with Lady Ellis gone?"

"On the ground, fallen between two stools," was Mr. Robert Lake's irreverent answer.

It angered Mrs. Chester; but she had an end to serve, and let it pass.

"I want you and your wife to do me a favour, Robert. Stay here for a week or two with us, paying me, of course; you know what my circumstances are. My heart would be good to

keep you, but my pocket is not. I am so afraid of Lady Ellis finding the place dull. She has come for a month to see how she likes it. I forget whether I told you this yesterday. On Monday, when we were talking together after her arrival, she said to me, 'You will allow me to stay a month to see if the place will suit me: if it does, we will then make our agreement.' What could I say?"

"And you fear it may not suit her?"

"I fear she will find it dull. She said this morning she thought the house would be triste but for the presence in it of Mr. and Mrs. Lake. Now, you do me a good turn, and stay a week or two."

"I'd stay fast enough, Penelope—there's the fishing; but I don't know about Clara. You must talk to her."

"*You* must talk to her," returned Mrs. Chester. "Nobody else has a tenth of the influence over her that you have."

"I'll see," said Mr. Lake, alighting from the dressing-table. "We'll stay a day or two longer, at any rate: I know I can promise that."

Mr. Lake went straight to his wife, and recounted to her, word for word as nearly as he

could recollect, what Mrs. Chester had said. There was nothing covert in his disposition: his fault, if it was a fault, was undisguised openness. But he did not urge the matter one way or the other. Clara looked grave at the proposition, and he left it to her.

"I said we would remain a day or two longer, Clara. I thought you would not object to that, as it is to do her, as she fancies, good."

"I don't mind staying to the end of the week, Robert, now we are here. We will go home on Saturday, if you like."

"All right." And Mr. Lake strolled away in his careless lightness.

CHAPTER VI.

JUSTICE THORNYCROFT'S VISIT.

The days passed pleasantly enough: Lady Ellis made herself agreeable, Mr. Lake was always so; and Clara nearly forgot her dream. On the Friday morning, a hot but cloudy day, Mr. Lake went out to fish. Lady Ellis and Fanny Chester strolled after him; and Mrs. Chester took the opportunity to—as she phrased it to herself—"tackle" Clara. That estimable and managing matron beguiled the young lady into the quiet and secluded nursery—a room above, that the children were never in—and there burst into a flood of tears over her work, the darning of a tablecloth, and laid her unhappy case bare in the broad light of day.

"Only another week after this, my dear Clara! If you would but consent to stay! Think what my position will be should Lady Ellis quit me!"

Clara hesitated. Just the same instinct arose

within her against staying at Guild, that in the first instance, the evening before the dream, had arisen against going to it. But she was gentle, young, pliable; it seemed to her that refusal would be an unkind thing, and she could not form her lips to say it.

"Would another week's stay make so very much difference to Lady Ellis, think you, Mrs. Chester?"

"My dear good soul, it would make all the difference. She'll have become accustomed to the place then, and will not care to leave it."

"Well—I will talk to Robert when he comes in."

"Of course—if you wish. But you know, Clara, the decision lies entirely with you. He will do what you suggest. Now, my dear, do picture to yourself the difference in our positions, yours and mine, and be hard-hearted if you can. You with your happy home to return to, your three servants, and your six hundred a year; and I with my poor pittance, my toiling life, and my heap of children!"

Mrs. Chester showered tears upon the table-cloth in her lap, and Clara Lake felt that she was in for it.

"If you and Robert will remain two weeks with me from the day you came, I shall be thankful.—My goodness me! who's that?"

Mrs. Chester alluded to the clatter of some steps on the stairs, and the entrance of two ladies. Unfortunately for Clara Lake, they were Mary and Margaret Jupp. In high spirits, and with their usual volubility, they explained that they had a commission to execute at Guild for their mother, which gave them the opportunity of paying a flying call at Mrs. Chester's.

Not so very flying; for the young ladies took off their bonnets and made themselves comfortable for an hour or two. Mrs. Chester—craftily foreseeing what valuable allies these would prove—melted into tears again, and renewed her request to Mrs. Lake. Abandoning pride and its reticence, she openly explained what a boon to her, poor distressed woman, it was that she was craving for, and avowed her poverty, and the terms on which Lady Ellis had come to her. The Miss Jupps had known all about it before, as Mrs. Chester knew, but she took advantage of the situation.

They did the same. In their open good nature, and they had no other motive, they urged

Clara to the promise. On the one hand, there would be the service to Mrs. Chester; on the other, a delightful holiday for Mr. and Mrs. Lake. Borne along on the stream of persuasion, assailed on all sides, Clara Lake felt that all power of resistance was taken from her, and she yielded to the stream.

Yielded to the stream, and gave the promise.

The Miss Jupps were clapping their hands at the victory, when Mr. Lake entered. Mrs. Chester explained the applause, by saying that dear Clara had promised to remain a fortnight at Guild.

"Have you?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"Yes; I have been over-persuaded," she replied, with rather a sickly smile.

The Miss Jupps applauded again, and a happy thought struck Mr. Lake; or an unhappy one. You can decide which as the history goes on.

It had been in contemplation to throw out a bay window in their dining-room at Katterley. A dark room and rather small, Mr. Lake and his wife had both decided that it should be altered. This, as it seemed to him, was the very time to set about the alteration. They had thought of deferring it until spring, but it would be a good

thing over; and he intended to have some of his Yorkshire friends up for Christmas. Approaching his wife, he spoke to her in a low tone.

"Begin the alteration now!—while we are here!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "But, Robert! how long will they be over it?"

"About a fortnight. They may begin and end it in that time."

"Do you think so?"

"I'm sure so," he answered, carelessly and confidently. "I'll make Peters put it in his contract. Why, Clara, what is it? just the throwing out of a window? They might do it in a week if they chose. But just as you like, my dear."

Again, hearing the conversation, Mrs. Chester and the Miss Jupps joined in, taking wholly Mr. Lake's view of the matter. The only one who spoke with an interested motive was Mrs. Chester: the others were as honest as the day in what they said—honest in their inexperience.

And Clara was borne down once more in this as in the last, and agreed to the alteration being begun.

"It won't be much more than putting in a fresh window frame," decided Margaret Jupp.

No more shilly-shallyings now, no more questions of whether they should go or not. Mr. Lake went over that same afternoon to Katterley, in attendance on the Miss Jupps; saw the builder, Peters, and had the work put in hand. On the Saturday he and his wife both went over, to return in the evening.

It was a sultry midday. Lady Ellis sat on the lawn under the shelter of a spreading lime-tree, whose branches had been more redolent of perfume a month or two ago than they were now.

The sky was cloudless, of a dark hot blue; the summer petals, clustering on the flower-beds, opened themselves to the blistering sun. Lady Ellis was alone with her netting. She wore a black silk gown and little cap of net, all the more coquettish for its simplicity, its plain lappets hanging behind. Her work proceeded slowly, and finally she let it fall on her knee as one utterly weary.

"What a life it is here!" she murmured in self-commune. "Say what they will, India is the paradise of women. Where means are in accordance; servants, dress, carriages, horses, incessant gaiety, it may be tolerable here; but

where they are lacking—good heavens! how do people manage to exist?"

"The world has gone hard with me," she resumed after a pause. "Two years of luxury to be succeeded by stagnation. I'd never have married Colonel Ellis—no, though he did give me a title—had I supposed his money would go to his children and not to me."

Another pause, during which she jerked the netting-silk up and down.

"And this house? shall I stay in it? But for that young man, who is rendering it bearable, I don't think I could. This managing clergyman's widow, with her flock of young ones, she is a study from nature—or art. Ah well, well! a month or two of it, and I shall go on the wing again."

Closing her eyes, as if weary with the world's view, Lady Ellis remained perfectly still, until the sound of rapidly advancing wheels aroused her. Looking up, she saw a very handsome carriage, a sort of mail phaeton, dash up to the gate. The gentleman driving got out and assisted down a girl of fair beauty, who had sat by his side; the groom having sprung round to the horses' heads from the seat behind.

They came up the path, and Lady Ellis looked at them. An exceedingly fine man, of middle age, tall and upright, with a handsome face still, and clear blue eyes. The girl was handsome too, she wore a beautiful dress of training silk, and a hat with blue ribbons. We have met them before —Mr. and Miss Thornycroft.

Looking about, as if seeking for the door of entrance, or for some one to receive them, their eyes fell upon Lady Ellis. She could do nothing less than advance to the rescue. Missing the turning that led by a shady path to the door, they could see only windows. Mr. Thornycroft raised his hat.

"I have the honour of speaking to Mrs. Chester?"

Lady Ellis laughed slightly at the supposition, and threw back her head, as much as to say it was a ridiculous and not flattering mistake.

"No, indeed. I am only staying here."

Mr. Thornycroft bowed in deprecation; Miss Thornycroft turned her head slightly aside and took a look at the speaker. There was a slight contraction on that young lady's queenly brow as she turned it back again.

Out of an upper window, surveying the new

guests, surveying the carriage being driven away by the groom to the nearest inn, was the head of Mrs. Chester; her cap off, her hair untidy, a cross look in her wondering eyes. Who were they, these people, interrupting her at that unseasonable hour? Strange to say, the truth did not strike her. They were underneath the windows, and she could take her survey at leisure.

Lady Ellis, quite capable of doing the honours of reception, ushered them into the drawing-room through the open window. At the same moment Anna Chester came forward in her poor frock and with her sweet face. Mr. Thornycroft had laid a card on the table, and she glanced at it in passing. Her manners were calm, self-possessed, gentle; an essentially lady-like girl in spite of the frock.

"I will tell mamma that you are here," she said, when they were seated; and she quitted the room again.

"Had I seen that young lady first, I should not have committed the mistake of taking you for Mrs. Chester," spoke Mr. Thornycroft in his gallantry.

Lady Ellis smiled. "That young lady is not

Mrs. Chester's daughter, however. Mrs. Chester's children are considerably younger."

Anna meanwhile was going upstairs. Mrs. Chester, doing something to the inside of a bed, had her black dress covered with fluff, and her hair also. She turned sharply round when Anna entered.

"Mamma, it is Justice Thornycroft."

What with the startling announcement—for Mrs. Chester took in the news at once—and what with the recollection of her own state of attire, Mrs. Chester turned her irritability upon Anna. It was provoking thus to be interrupted at her very necessary work.

"*Justice* Thornycroft! What in the world possesses you to call the man that, Anna Chester?"

"Mrs. Copp called him so in her letter to me, mamma."

Mrs. Copp's a fool," retorted the bewildered lady. "Justice Thornycroft! One would think you had been bred in a wood. Who do you suppose uses those obsolete terms now? What brings him over here to-day?"

She put the question in a sharp, exacting tone, just as if it were Anna's business to answer

it, and Anna's fault that he had come. Anna quietly went to a closet and took out Mrs. Chester's best gown.

"To come on a Saturday! Nothing was ever so unreasonable," groaned Mrs. Chester. "Here's all the flock and the down out of the bed, and I covered with it. Look at my crape! Look at my hair! I took off my cap because those bothering lappets got in my way."

"You will have your gown changed in two minutes, mamma, and I will smooth your hair."

Mrs. Chester jerked the gown out of Anna's hands. One of those active, restless women, who cannot bear to be still while anything is done for them, was she; and began to put it on herself, grumbling all the while.

"Nothing in the world ever happened so contrary. Of all things, I wanted, if these Thorneycrofts did come over, to keep them from Lady Ellis. Once let her get an inkling of their business, and she'd be off the next day. And there they are, shut up with her. I dare say she knows it all by now."

"Oh, mamma, it is not likely Mr. Thorneycroft would speak of it to her."

"Indeed! That's your opinion, is it? Give me the hair-brush."

She brushed away at her hair, Anna standing meekly by with a clean cap ready to put on. Mrs. Chester continued her catalogue of grievances.

"It is the worst day they could have come. All things are at sixes and sevens on a Saturday. The children are dirty, and the plate's dirty, and the servants are dirty. They must have luncheon, I suppose—or dinner, for that's what it will be to them, coming this long drive. Mr. Thornycroft can possess no sense to take me by storm in this manner. Anna, I hope you did not proclaim to them that you were a daughter of the house," she added, the thought suddenly striking her.

Anna's face flushed. She had spoken of Mrs. Chester as "mamma," and when she went in Lady Ellis had said, "This is Miss Chester." Under the stern gaze now bent upon her, poor Anna felt as if she had committed some not-to-be-atoned-for crime.

"In that wretched frock of yours! You have not the least sense of shame in you, Anna. Over and over again I have said you were born to disgrace me. Why could you not have passed

yourself off for an upper maid or nursery governess, or something of that sort? Or else kept out of the way altogether."

It never struck Anna Chester that the reproach was unmerited; it did not occur to her to petition for a better frock, since that one was so shabby She had a better, kept for Sundays and rare holidays; to put it on on a week-day, unless commanded to do so, would have been an astounding inroad on the order of things. Reared to self-sacrifice and privation, that sacrifice and privation that a poor clergyman—a good, loving, but needy gentleman, must practise who has the care of those poorer than himself—Anna Chester had lived but to love and obey. When her father gained his living (that looked so wealthy in prospect), and the new wife—this present Mrs. Chester, now bending her eyes condemningly upon her—came home close upon it, Anna's habit of submission was but slightly changed. Formerly she had yielded wholly to her father in her intense respect and love; now she had to yield to her stepmother in exacted, unquestioning obedience. She never thought of repining or rebelling. Brought up to think herself of no earthly consequence, as one whose sole mission

in life it was to be useful to others, doing all she could for every one and ignoring self, it may be questioned if any young girl's spirit had ever been brought to the same state of perfect discipline. Never in her whole life had Anna rebelled at a request or resisted a command; to be told to do a thing was to obey. But for her naturally sweet temper, her utter want of selfishness, and the humble estimation imparted to her of herself, this could hardly have been. She stood there now, listening repentantly to the reproaches, the disparaging words of her second mother, and accepted them as her right. That lady, a very pharisee in her own opinion, gave a finishing twitch to her widow's cap, to her collar, to the "weepers" on her wrists, took the broad hem-stitched handkerchief that Anna held in readiness for her, and turned to leave the room.

"What shall I do now, mamma?" came the meek question.

"Do?—ay to be sure," continued Mrs. Chester, recalled by the words; "why, you must go to the kitchen and see what sort of a lunch can be sent up. I had ordered the cold fowl and ham with salad, and the cold mutton for you and the

children. The mutton must be hashed now; very nicely, mind; you can cut it up yourself: and the veal cutlet that was intended in for dinner, must be dressed with herbs, tell Nanny; and some young potatoes. The tart can come in and the cream, and—and that will do. I shall make it our dinner, apologizing privately to Lady Ellis for the early hour, and call it luncheon to the Thornycrofts."

"Are the children to be at table?"

"Certainly not. What are you thinking of? You must keep them with you. The miserable thing is that Elizabeth went back with the Lakes this morning; she's so respectable a servant to be seen behind one's chair in waiting. Tell Dinah to put on her merino gown, and make herself tidy."

Away went Mrs. Chester to the drawing-room, the cares of the many orders and contrivances on her shoulders, and away went Anna to the kitchen to see to the execution of them, to aid in their preparation, to keep in quietness by her side (an exceedingly difficult task) the noisy children. Little did Mr. Thornycroft, bowing to the comely and well-dressed widow lady who introduced herself as Mrs. Chester, think of the

trouble the advent of himself and his daughter was causing.

Mrs. Chester had accused him of possessing no sense. He possessed plenty, and also tact. As Mrs. Chester remained silent as to the object of his visit, ignoring it apparently altogether; rather boasting of how glad she was to make their acquaintance, to see them there for a day's change; he said nothing of it either. Mrs. Chester was on thorns though all the while, and talked rather at random. Lady Ellis was content to sit displaying her charms, and to put in a word or a smile here and there. Mr. Thornycroft said something about going to the hotel for luncheon.

"Oh, but surely you will remain and take luncheon with me?" said Mrs. Chester, with as much *empressement* as though she had a larder full of good things to send up.

"Would you prefer that we should do so?" asked Mr. Thornycroft.

He put the question quite simply. Luncheon and other meals were provided for so munificently in his own house, it did not occur to him that his remaining could cause embarrassment in Mrs. Chester's. That lady answered that it would give her great pain if they departed, and

Mary Anne Thornycroft took off her hat. Turning to place it on a side-table, she saw a very fine piece of coral there, shaped something like a basket.

"Oh, papa, look at this!" she exclaimed. "It must be the fellow-piece to the one at Mrs. Connaught's."

"What Connaughts are those?" asked Lady Ellis, briskly. "I knew a Mrs. Connaught once."

This Mrs. Connaught, who had lived about two years at Coastdown, proved to be the same. Lady Ellis noted down the address in her pocket case.

Later, when all had dispersed, Mrs. Chester seized on her opportunity.

"I think we can have a few minutes alone now, Mr. Thornycroft, if you wish to speak to me. May I flatter myself that your visit to-day is to make arrangements for placing your daughter under my charge?"

"Madam, I came to-day not to make arrangements,—that would be premature,—but to ascertain if possible whether such arrangements would be suitable," he replied in his open manner. "I do wish very much to find an eligible home for

my daughter, where she may complete her education and be happy. Captain and Mrs. Copp, —some connexion of yours, I believe?"

"Of my late husband's," interposed Mrs. Chester, quickly, as though not willing to claim connexion with Captain and Mrs. Copp; "that is, of his first wife's. I don't know them at all."

"Ah, indeed; very worthy people they are. Well, madam, Mrs. Copp spoke to me of you; The widow, she said, of the Reverend James Chester, of Guild. I had some slight knowledge of him in early days. You were intending to take some pupils on the plan of a private family, Mrs. Copp said, and she thought it might suit Miss Thornycroft."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Chester, scarcely knowing what to reply in her uncertainty of plans, "I did think of it."

"And do you wish still to carry it out?"

"Yes, oh yes; if I could get the pupils."

"I had better tell you what I require for my daughter," observed Mr. Thornycroft. "She must be in a family where the habits and arrangements are essentially good; not the scanty, coarse provision generally pertaining to a school. She must be well waited on, well fed, well

treated; her companions must be the daughters of gentlemen; her education must be continued on the same liberal scale as that on which it has been hitherto conducted. And I should wish her to get from the lady principal that good, conscientious, careful training that is rarely given except by a mother."

"Is she well advanced for her age? In music, for instance?" asked Mrs. Chester, after a pause.

"Very well. She plays the harp and piano, sings, and has begun harmony. German and French she speaks well; but, all that you can inquire into yourself. In saying that her education must be liberal, the word is sufficiently comprehensive."

"And for these advantages what sum would you be prepared to pay?"

"Whatever was asked me, madam, in reason —in reason, of course. I am at my ease in the world in regard to money, and shall certainly not spare it on my only daughter."

Mrs. Chester's mouth watered. She was sure she had heard of such a thing as *three* hundred a year being asked in a case like this, and given. Time enough for terms, though, yet.

"Miss Thornycroft has hitherto been educated at home, I believe?"

"She has; but she is getting beyond the control of her governess, Miss Derode, and I think she would be better at school for the next year or two. A good soul, poor Miss Derode, as ever lived, and thoroughly accomplished; but Mary Anne has begun to laugh at her instead of obeying her. That won't do, you know."

Mrs. Chester sat twirling the crape of her dress between her fingers in thought. Presently she looked at Mr. Thornycroft.

"Have you thought of any sum that might be suitable—for the advantages you require?"

"I should think about two hundred a year. I would give that."

"Very fair," murmured Mrs. Chester. "Of course, any little extras—but that can be left for the present. I should like much to take her."

"For this sum I should expect commensurate advantages," continued Mr. Thornycroft, in his straightforward, candid way. "At present I do not see—you will forgive me, madam—that you are at all prepared for such a pupil. You have no pupils, I think?"

"Not yet."

"And I should wish my daughter to have companions, young ladies of her own age—just three or four, to reconcile her to being away from home, the notion which she does not at all relish. A resident governess would also be essential—unless indeed the lady superintendent devoted her whole time to them."

"Yes, yes; a resident governess, of course," mechanically answered Mrs. Chester.

What more might have been said was arrested by the entrance of the youngest child, his pinafore and mouth smeared with treacle. Clamouring for bread and treacle, Anna had given him a slice to keep him quiet. In the midst of eating it he had broken away, ungrateful boy, and rushed into the presence of Mrs. Chester. Dinah, who had not got on her merino gown yet, or made herself tidy, came and carried him, kicking, away again. Mrs. Chester was depressed by the accident, and sat subdued.

"I think, madam, that if you carry your intention out, the better way will be for you to write to me as soon as you are ready to receive pupils," said Mr. Thornycroft. "I will then consider the matter further, and decide whether

or not to send you my daughter. There is no great hurry; Miss Derode has not left us."

"You will not promise her to me?"

"I cannot do that, Mrs. Chester," was the answer, given with prompt decision. "Until I see that arrangements would be suitable, that the home would be in all respects desirable, I can say no more."

Mrs. Chester sighed inwardly, and felt from that moment she must resign hope — Miss Thornycroft and her liberal pay would not be for her. But she suffered nothing of this to appear, some latent aspiration might be lingering yet, and she rose up gaily and shook Mr. Thornycroft's hand in a warmth of satisfaction, and said the matter, left so, was all that was to be desired.

And then they took the luncheon—Mrs. Chester, Lady Ellis, Mr. and Miss Thornycroft. Some fruit was set out on the lawn afterwards, and coffee was to follow. Lady Ellis did the honours of the garden to Mr. Thornycroft, nothing loth; walking up this path with him, down that; halting to sit on this rustic bench, entering that shady bower. A very charming woman, thought Justice Thornycroft.

Miss Thornycroft was left to the companionship of Mrs. Chester. And that young lady, with the freedom she was accustomed to make known her wishes at home, asked that Anna Chester might join them.

"I promised Mrs. Copp to take word back of her welfare, and what sort of a girl she was," said Mary Anne. "How can I do so unless I see her?"

With outward alacrity and inward wrath, Mrs. Chester disappeared for a moment, and sent a private telegram to Anna that she was to dress herself and come out. In five minutes the girl was with them. She came with the coffee. Her black silk dress (made out of one of Mrs. Chester's old ones) was pretty; her face was flushed with its refined, delicate colour, her brown eyes sparkled with their soft brilliancy, her chestnut hair was smooth and pretty. Essentially a lady was Anna now. Justice Thornycroft, coming up then for the coffee with Lady Ellis, took her hands in his and held her before him.

"My dear, I can trace in you a great likeness to your father. It is just the same refined, patient face."

Ere the words were well spoken, the brown

eyes were wet, the sweet lips were quivering. The loss of her father, so intensely loved, had been Anna's great grief in life. A chance reminiscence, such as this, was more than she could bear.

"Did you know papa, sir?" she asked, looking bravely up through the tears.

"I knew a little of him many years ago, and I once or twice saw your mother. You must come and pay us a visit at Coastdown."

A glad light in the gentle face.

"I should like it very much, sir. Mrs. Copp has already invited me to go to them; but I cannot be spared."

"You must be spared; I should like you to come," spoke Mary Anne, imperiously, with the tone of one who is not accustomed to have her slightest wish disputed. But the waiting coffee and Mrs. Chester turned off the subject.

The clock was striking five when the punctual groom appeared with the carriage. Down it came with grand commotion, its fine horses fresh after their rest, and stopped at the gate. The whole party escorted Mr. and Miss Thornycroft to it: Mrs. Chester and Anna, the children,

tidy now and on tolerable behaviour, Lady Ellis and her fascination. Promises of future friendly intercourse were exchanged. Mr. Thornycroft gave a positive undertaking to drive over again and spend another day, and they took their places in the carriage. Away went the horses in a canter, rather restive; the justice, restraining them, had enough to do to raise his hat in farewell salutation; the groom had a run ere he could gain his seat behind. And they started on their long drive of three-and-twenty miles.

At the same moment, appearing from an opposite quarter, came Mr. and Mrs. Lake and Elizabeth on their return from Katterley. They were near enough to see the carriage go swiftly off, but not to distinguish its inmates. Mrs. Chester and the rest waited for them at the gate.

"Have you had visitors, Penelope?" asked Mr. Lake.

"Yes. And very cross and contrary I felt it that you were not here," continued Mrs. Chester, who was proud of her good-looking brother. "It is Mr. Thornycroft and his daughter—they have been with us ever since twelve o'clock. To

think that you were away! I am sure Clara would have liked Miss Thornycroft."

To think that they were away!—that the two ladies spoken of did not meet! One of them at least would deem it a chance missed, a singular fact, in the years to come.

CHAPTER VII.

GOING FISHING.

A CHILLY evening. The hot days of August have passed away; this is October, and the night is turning out raw and misty. But in Mrs. Chester's house warmth and light reign, at least in the inhabited rooms of it.

In one of them, a moderate-sized, comfortable apartment, whose windows opened to the ground, the large fire had burned down to a red glow, after rendering the atmosphere unpleasantly warm; and a lady, seated in a lounging chair, had pushed it quite back, so that she was in the shade both from the light and the fire. A look of perplexity, of care, sat on her face, young and lovely though it was; even in her hands, as they lay listless on her lap, there was an air of abandonment. But that the room was growing dusk and dim in the autumn twilight, that sadness might not have been suffered to show itself, although she was alone.

It was Clara Lake. Her thoughts were buried in a painful retrospect—the retrospect of only the two past months. They had brought grief to her: as the summer did to the unhappy girl, told of in that beautiful ballad Anna Chester sometimes sung, "The Banks of Allan Water."

Had any one warned Clara Lake the previous August, when she came to Mrs. Chester's for a two days' visit, that the sojourn would not be one of days but months, she had simply disbelieved it. Even when the term was extended to a proposed fortnight—a fortnight in all—she would have laughed at the idea of staying longer. But she had stayed. She was here still. Nevertheless, things had so turned out; all easily and naturally, as it seemed, to look back upon. As it seemed to her now, sitting in her chair, and tracing the course of past events.

The alteration in their house at Katterley, as proposed by Mr. Lake, and which was to be completed in ten days or a fortnight, was begun in due course—the throwing out of the dining-room by means of a bay window. He and his wife went over one day to see the progress of the work. It was then suggested—whether by the builder, by her husband, by herself, or by all

three jointly, Clara could not to this hour recollect—that, to make a complete job of it, the window in the chamber above should also be thrown out. The additional expense would be comparatively little, the improvement great; and it was agreed to on the spot. Orders were also given for the drawing-room and their own chamber to be painted, repapered, and decorated.

"Won't it take a long time?" Clara suddenly asked.

"About a month, if they work well; certainly not more," replied Mr. Lake.

He must have known little of workmen, to speak so confidently. Builders, carpenters, painters, decorators, are not famous for working themselves thin through over-hurry. The popular saying, "If once you get them into your house, you never get them out," seemed to be exemplified in this one instance. Here was October come in, and Katterley Lodge was as far off being ready for reception as ever.

It would have been a slight grievance, the detention, to Mr. and Mrs. Lake—not any, in fact, to him—for Mrs. Chester's house was an agreeable one, and they had no home tics; but

Lady Ellis was making the stay insupportable to Mr. Lake's wife.

Tolerably young, showy, very handsome according to the taste of many, exacting attention, living but in admiration, and not scrupulous how she obtained it provided she got it, Lady Ellis had begun to cast her charming toils on the careless and attractive Robert Lake in the very first hour of their meeting. Not to eat him up; not intending certainly to be eaten herself; only to be her temporary slave, pour faire passer le temps. In that dull country house, where there was no noise or excitement but what arose from its children, Lady Ellis wanted something to make the time pass.

Mr. Lake was perfectly ready to meet her half-way. One of those men who, wife or no wife, consider a flirtation with a pretty woman—and with one not pretty, for the matter of that—a legitimate occupation in their idle life, he responded to her advances gallantly. Neither of them had any idea of plunging into shoals and quicksands; let us so far give both their due. A rather impressive clasp of the hand; a prolonged walk in the glowing beauty of the summer's day; an interchange of confidential talk, meaning

nothing—that was the worst, thought of by either. But then, you see, the mischief is, that when once these things are fairly embarked in, the course entered upon and its midway post reached, down you glide, swimmingly, unwittingly; and it is an exceedingly difficult matter to turn back. Good chance (to call it so here), generally sends the opportunity, but it is not always seized upon.

The flirtation began. There were walks in the morning sun, shady garden chairs for rest at noontide, lingerings in the open air by twilight, that grateful hour after a sultry day. There were meetings indoors, meetings out; singing, talking, netting, idling. Mr. Lake went fishing, his favourite pastime just now, and my Lady Ellis would carry his luncheon to him; or stroll down later, wait until the day's sport was at an end, and stroll home with him. One or other of the children was often with her, serving to satisfy the requisites of propriety, had friends been difficult.

None were so. For a whole month this agreeable life went on, and nobody gave it a care or a thought. Certainly Clara did not. She was accustomed to see her husband's light

admiration given to others; never yet had a suspicion crossed her mind that he had more than admiration to give. That his love was exclusively hers, to be hers for ever, she believed in as fully as she believed in heaven.

Well, the month passed, August; and September was entered upon. The flirtation (to call it so for want of a better word), had grown pretty deep. The morning walks were frequent; the noontide restings were confidential, the twilight lingerings were prolonged to starlight. The songs became duets, the conversation whispers; the netting was as often in his hands as hers, and the silk purse did not progress. Mr. Lake drove Lady Ellis out in the stylish little open carriage, conveniently made for two persons and no more, that he was fond of hiring at Guild. One day Fanny Chester went with them; my lady's dress got crushed, and of course the inconvenience could not be allowed to occur again. Twice a week she rode with him, requiring very much of his care in the open country, for she said she was a timid horsewoman. In short, they had plunged into a whirligig round of days that was highly agreeable to the two concerned.

Sharp-eyed Mrs. Chester—nearly as sharp as

Lady Ellis herself, but more honest—saw quite well what was going on. "Don't you go and make a fool of yourself with that woman, Robert!" she said to him one day, which sent Mr. Lake into a fit of laughter. He thought himself just the last man to do it. And on went the time again.

Imperceptibly—she could not remember how or when it first arose—a shade of annoyance, of vexation, stole upon Mrs. Lake. Her husband was always with Lady Ellis; except at meals and at night, he was never with her; and she began to think it was not quite right that it should be so. Crafty Mrs. Chester—honest enough in the main, but treacherous in this one matter—was on thorns lest Clara should take alarm and cause an outbreak; which would not have done at all. She did what she could to keep alarm off, and would have to reconcile it to her conscience in later days. Mr. and Mrs. Lake paid her well, and that was also a consideration.

"Clara, dear, it is so good of your husband to help me," she would say, or words similar. "He has never been a true brother to me until now. Were it not for him I am sure Lady Ellis would die of ennui in this place. He keeps her amused

for me, doing what he can to make her days pass pleasantly. I shall be ever thankful to him."

Once, and once only, Clara went to the fishing stream after them. It was a mile and a half away, the one they had gone fishing in that day. They! Lady Ellis had a costly little rod now, bought for her by Mr. Lake, and went with him. Clara, having nothing better to do in the afternoon, uneasily conscious of the advent of incipient jealousy arising in her heart, thought she would join the party. Her husband had never asked her to do so at any time; upon her hinting that she should like to fish too, he had stopped the idea at once: "No, she would be too fatigued." Mrs. Lake, it was true, was not strong; heat and fatigue knocked her up. Mrs. Chester had been crafty from the first. One day in the early stage of the affair, seeing her husband and Lady Ellis sitting together in the shade at noontide, Clara was innocently stepping out at the window to sit too, when Mrs. Chester interposed to prevent it. "Good gracious, Clara! don't go stealing out like that. They may think you want to hear what they are saying—out of jealousy." And the word "jealousy" only caused an amusing laugh to

Clara Lake then; but she remained indoors. Well, on this afternoon, she started for the stream, taking Master James Chester in her hand. Master James abandoned her *en route,* going off on his own devices, and she was alone when she reached them. A deliciously shady place she found it; the chance passers-by beyond the trees at the back few and far between. Both were sitting on the bank, attending to their lines, which were deep in the water. They looked round with surprise, and Lady Ellis was the first to speak.

"Have you come to look after us, Mrs. Lake?"

Innocent words, sufficiently courteous in themselves, but not in the tone with which they were spoken. There was a mocking under-current in it, implying much; at least, Clara fancied so, and it brought the red flush of shame to her cheeks. Open, candid, ultra-refined herself, to spy upon others would have been against her very nature. It seemed to her that in that light she was looked upon, as a spy, and inwardly resolved not to intrude again.

James Chester made his appearance in the course of time, and Clara set off home with him.

They asked her to stay until the sport was at an end; her husband pressed it; but she could not get over that tone, and said she would walk very quietly on, that they might overtake her. Master James went off as before, and Clara thought of the interview. "There was no harm; there can be none; they were only fishing," she murmured to herself. "What a stupid thing I was!"

"Where's Jemmy?" asked Mrs. Chester, coming forth to meet her.

"I'm sure I can't tell. He ran away from me both in going and returning. It was not my fault. He does not mind anybody a bit, you know."

"Why did you not wait to come home with Robert and Lady Ellis?"

"I don't know. I wanted to get back, for one thing; I was tired. And I don't much think Lady Ellis liked my going."

"My dear Clara, you must not take up vague fancies," spoke Mrs. Chester, after a pause. "One would think you were growing jealous, as the boys and girls do. Nothing can be in worse taste for a lady, even when there may be apparent grounds for it. In this case the very

thought would be absurd; Lady Ellis is ten years older than your husband."

And so, what with one thing and another, Clara was subdued to passive quietness, and Mr. Lake and Lady Ellis had it all their own way. But her suspicions that they were growing rather too fond of each other's company had been aroused, and she naturally, perhaps unconsciously, watched, not in the unfounded fancy of an angry woman, a jealous wife, but in the sick fear of a loving one. She saw the flirtation (again I must apologize for the name) grow into sentiment, if not to passion; she saw it lapse into concealment—which is a very bad sign. And now that October had come in and was passing, Clara Lake's whole inward life was one scene of pain, of conflict, of wild jealousy preying upon her very heartstrings. She had loved her husband with all the fervour of a deeply imaginative nature; had believed in him with the perfect trustingness of an innocent-hearted, honest English girl.

She sat in her chair there in the drawing-room, drawn away from the fire's heat, her eyes fixed on vacancy, her pretty hands lying weary. What was that heat compared to the heat that raged within, the mind's fever?

"If it could but end!" she murmured to herself; "if we could but go back to our home at Katterley!"

Strange to say—and yet perhaps not strange, for the natural working out of a course of events is often hidden to the chief actor in it—the dream and its superstitious dread had faded away from Clara's memory. Of course she had not forgotten the fact; whenever she thought of it, as she did at odd times, its features presented themselves to her as vividly as ever. But the dread of it was gone. When day succeeded day, week succeeded week, bringing no appearance of any tragic end for her, accident or else, that could put her into a hearse, the foreboding fear quite subsided. Besides, Clara Lake looked upon the accident to the railway-train that Sunday night as the one that would have killed her had she only been in it. So the dream and its superstition had become as a thing of the past.

Lonely, dispirited, unusually low, felt she this afternoon. Mr. Lake had gone over in the morning to Katterley to see how their house was progressing, and she began to wonder that he was not back. They had taken dinner early that day, and Lady Ellis had disappeared after it.

When Mr. Lake was away she would invariably go up to her room after dinner, saying she had letters to write. Shrewd Fanny Chester, taking after her quick mother, said my lady went up to get a nap, not to write. Mrs. Chester was in the nursery, where she had a dressmaker at work, making clothes for her children; Anna was helping; and Clara was alone.

It may as well be mentioned that the mystery attaching to the cause of the railway accident had not been solved yet. The coroner and jury had met regularly once a fortnight since, and as regularly adjourned the inquest. In the teeth of Colonel West's most positive testimony, it was impossible to bring in a verdict against Cooper, the driver; in the teeth of Oliver Jupp's, it was equally impossible to exonerate him. No other witnesses, save the parties interested, appeared to have seen the lights that night. The public were fairly nonplussed, the coroner and jury sick to death of the affair. The young person now working for Mrs. Chester was Cooper's sister.

The red embers were fading down nearly to blackness, when Fanny Chester came bursting into the room to Clara in her rather boisterous

manner. Clara aroused herself, glad perhaps of the interruption to her thoughts.

"Is it you, Fanny? Where are they all, dear?"

"Mamma's at work in the nursery. She's running the seams, and showing Miss Cooper how she wants the bodies cut. Anna's there too. Have you seen Uncle Robert?"

"Uncle Robert is not back yet, Fanny."

"Yes, he is," replied the young lady, who at all times was fond of her own opinion.

"You are mistaken," said Clara. "He would have come in to me the first thing."

"But I saw him. I saw him in the garden ever so long ago. Lady Ellis was with him. They were at the back there, walking towards the shrubbery."

Indisputable testimony; and Clara Lake could have bitten her tongue for saying "He would have come to me the first thing," although her audience consisted only of a child. Mr. Lake was to have brought her some book from home that he had forgotten the previous time; she was ardently longing for it, and thought he would at least have come straight to her and delivered it.

"Will you please reach me one of those old

newspapers up there," proceeded Fanny. "Mamma sent me for it. She wants to cut a pattern."

Giving the child the newspaper she asked for, Mrs. Lake shut the door after her and drew to the window, her heart beating rebelliously. "So he was back ever so long ago, and solacing himself with the sweet companionship of Lady Ellis." As she stood there, looking out on the darkening gloom—fit type of the gloom within—Clara asked herself the serious question, Was this constant seeking of each other's society but the result of accident; of a nonsensical liking which meant really nothing, and would pass away; or was it that they were really in love with each other, and *she* losing her place in her husband's heart?

An impulse—a wild impulse—which she could not restrain, and perhaps did not try to, led her to open the glass doors and step out: some vague feeling in her unhappy mind making itself heard amidst the inward tumult of wishing to see with her own eyes whether the child's information was true. It might *not* have been her husband; it might have been the curate, or Oliver Jupp, or that big Mr. Winterton, all of whom were fond of coming and of walking with Lady

Ellis when they got the chance; and she would go and see. Pretty sophist! Poor Clara knew in her inmost heart that it was Robert Lake, and no other: instinct told her so. Had she given herself a moment's time for reflection, she would probably not have gone. To an honourable nature—and Clara Lake's was essentially such—the very idea of looking after even a recreant husband is abhorrent. But jealousy is the strongest passion that can assail the human heart, whether of man or woman. Under its influence we do not stop to raise questions of expediency.

The raw fog pervading the air struck upon her with a chill as she came out of the heated room. She had nothing on but a thin muslin body, and shivered quite unconsciously. What cared she for the cold or the heat? Had she been plunged into a bath of ice she would not have felt it then. On she went, sweeping round the lawn in the dusky twilight; for it was not dark yet—keeping close to the trees, that their friendly shade might shelter her from chance eyes. Fanny Chester's words, "Going towards the shrubbery," serving for her guide unconsciously, she made for the same place.

Well, what did she find or see? Nothing very dreadful, taking it in the abstract; but quite enough to fan the jealous indignation of a wife, especially of one who *loves* her husband.

The shrubbery appeared to be empty; and Clara had gone half way down it, past one of its cross openings, when, from that very opening, sounds of voices and footsteps advancing struck upon her ear. Retreat was not expedient: they might see her pass; and she darted into a deep alcove the shrubs had been trained to make, before which ran a bench. Cowering almost into the very laurels, she stood there in sick fear. Never had she intended to get so near, and almost wished for the earth to open and bury her alive rather than she should be seen. Her heart beating with a wild shame, as if she had been caught in some great crime, there she had to stay.

On they came in their supreme unconsciousness, turning into the shrubbery, and alas! towards the verdant alcove. Clara's eyes were strained to look, and her poor breath came in gasps.

They were arm-in-arm; and Mr. Lake held one of my lady's hands, lightly toying with its

fingers. He was speaking in low, tender tones —the same tones which had been given to *her* before their marriage, and had won her heart for ever. What he was saying she could not in her agitation tell, but as they were passing her, going from the house, you understand, not to it, Lady Ellis spoke.

"Robert, it is getting dark and cold."

Robert! Had she known his wife was listening! It might have made no difference.

"The dark will not hurt you," he said, louder. "You are with me."

"But it is damp also. Indeed, since I returned from India, I feel both the damp and cold very much."

She spoke in a timid, gentle tone: as different from her natural tones, as different from those she used to any *but* him, as can well be imagined. That she had set herself out to gain his love seemed a sure fact. How far Lady Ellis contemplated going, or Mr. Lake either, and what they may have anticipated would be the final upshot, how or where it was to end, was best known to themselves. Let it lie with them.

"There's a shawl of yours, I think, Angeline,

in the summer-house. Sit you there while I get it."

He left her on the bench, behind which his wife was standing: they touched each other within an inch or two. Clara drew in her breath, and wished the earth *would* open. Lady Ellis began a scrap of a song, as if she did not like being alone in the darkness. Her voice, whether in singing or speaking, was loud and shrill, though she modified it for Mr. Lake. An antediluvian sort of song: goodness knows where she could have picked it up. Perhaps the stars, beginning to twinkle above, suggested its recollection to her.

"As many bright stars as appeared in the sky,
As many young lovers were caught by my eye;
And I was a beauty then, oh then,
And I was a beauty then.

"But now that I'm married, good what, good what!
I'm tied to a proud and fantastical fop,
Who follows another and cares for me not.

"But when I'm a widow I'll live at my ease,
I'll go all about, and I'll do as I please,
And take care how I marry again, again;
And take care how I marry again."

She had time to sing the three stanzas through,

repeating the last line of the first and third verses as a refrain.

Mr. Lake came back swinging the shawl on his arm—a warm grey woollen one. "All right at last, Angeline. I could not find it, and had to strike a fusee for a light. It had slipped behind the seat. I began to think you must have carried it away to-day."

"I did not know it was there," she answered.

"Don't you remember throwing it off last evening when we were sitting there, saying you felt hot? Now be quiet: I'll wrap you up myself. Have you any pins?"

She had risen, and he put the shawl on her head and shoulders; then turned her round and pinned it under her chin, so that only her face was visible. With such care!—oh, with such care!

"You are taking as much trouble as though I were going to stay out for an hour!"

"I wish we were."

"Do you? What would your wife say?"

"Nothing. And if she did — what then? There, you can't feel the cold now."

"No; I don't think I can."

"But what am I to have for my pains?"

She made no answer. In truth, he did not wait for it. Bending his own face on the one he held up, he left a kiss and a loving word upon it: "My dearest!" A long and passionate kiss, as it sounded in his wife's ear.

Lady Ellis, perhaps not prepared for so demonstrative a proceeding, spoke a rebuke. He only laughed. They moved away; he retaining his arm around her for a lingering moment, as though to keep the shawl in its place; and their voices were dropped again to a soft sweet whisper, that scarcely disturbed the stillness of the murky autumn night.

Very different from the tone of that wail—had any been near to note it—when Clara Lake left her hiding-place; a low wail, as of a breaking heart, that came forth and mingled with the inclement evening air.

Some writer has remarked—and I believe it was Bulwer Lytton, in his "Student"—that to the vulgar there is but one infidelity in love. It is perfectly true; but I think the word "vulgar" is there misplaced, unless we may apply it to all, whether inmates of the palace or the cottage, whose temperament is not of the ultra-refined. *Ultra*-refined, mind! they of the sensitive, proud,

impassioned nature, whose inward life, its thoughts, its workings, can never be betrayed to the world, any more than they themselves can be understood by it. Alas for them! They are hardly fit to dwell on this earth, to do battle with its sins and its cares; for their spirit is more exalted than is well: it may be said, more etherealized. The gold too highly refined, remember, is not adapted for general use. That the broad, vulgar idea conveyed by the word infidelity, is not their infidelity, is very certain. It is the unfaithfulness of the spirit, the wandering of the heart's truth to another, that constitutes infidelity for them; and where such comes, it shatters the heart's life as effectually as a blast of lightning shatters the tree it falls on. *This* was the infidelity that wrought the misery of Clara Lake: that other infidelity, whether it was or was not to have place in the future, she barely glanced at. Her husband's love had left her: it was given to another; and what mattered aught else? The world had closed to her; never again could she have, as it seemed, any place in it. Henceforth life would be a mockery.

She returned shivering to the house—not

apparently with the cold from without, but from the chill within—entering by the glass doors. The fire was nearly out; it wanted stirring and replenishing. She never saw it, never noticed it; but crept upstairs to her own room to hide herself. We cannot follow her; for you may not doubt that the quarter of an hour she stopped in it she had *need* to be alone, away from the wondering eyes of men.

Only a quarter of an hour. Clara Lake was not one of your loud women, who like their wrongs to be proclaimed to the world, and punished accordingly. In her sensitive reticence, she dreaded their betrayal more than any earthly thing. So she rose from her knees, and lifted her head from the chair, where it had lain in utter abandonment of spirit, and smoothed her hair, and went out of her room again to disarm suspicion, and was her calm self once more. At that same moment, though she knew it not, Mr. Lake and Lady Ellis were slowly strolling across the grass to enter by the same glass doors, their promenade, which they had been taking up and down the broad walk since quitting the shrubbery, having come to a decorous end.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATCHING A CHILL.

The warm light from the open nursery door flashed across Clara Lake's path in the corridor, and she went in. Mrs. Chester was running some slate-coloured breadths together, the lining for a black frock for Fanny. Miss Cooper sat at the table equally busy. She was a steady, industrious young woman, as well-conducted as her brother, the unfortunate engine-driver; and many ladies employed her at their houses by day.

"Is it you, Clara?" cried Mrs. Chester, looking up. "I'm coming down. I suppose you are all wondering what has become of me? Is tea on the table?"

"I—I don't know; I have been in my room," replied Mrs. Lake, taking a low chair near the fire.

Anna, with her quick ear of discernment—at

work apart from the rest, with very little benefit of the candles' light—turned round and looked at Clara, as if something in the tone were unnatural; disguised. But she said nothing. Clara seemed absorbed in the fire.

Light, quick steps were heard on the stairs, and Robert Lake dashed in, a gay smile on his face. "Pretty housekeepers you are! The drawing-room fire's gone out."

"The fire gone out!" repeated Mrs. Chester, in consternation. "What will Lady Ellis say? Clara, dear, what could you have been thinking of? You should have rung for coals."

"It was a good fire when I left it," murmured Clara, believing she spoke in accordance with the truth.

"And the fire was all red coals, and the room as hot as could be when I went in for that newspaper," put in Fanny Chester.

"Run, Fanny, and tell them to make up the fire again, and to put in plenty of sticks," said Mrs. Chester. "Has Lady Ellis not been sitting with you this afternoon, Clara?"

"No."

"In her own room, no doubt, writing letters. I hope she is there still. So you have got back,

Robert," Mrs. Chester added, turning to her brother.

"Safe and sound," was Mr. Lake's response, as he stood surveying the table and the work going on. "What are you so busy over, all of you?"

Mrs. Chester, bending her eyes and fingers on a complicated join, inserted from consideration of economy, did not take the trouble to answer. Mr. Lake went round to his wife.

"How are you by this time, Clary?" he lightly said; as, standing between her and the table, he bent down to the low chair where she sat, and kissed her forehead.

It was a cold kiss; a careless matter-of-fact sort of kiss, à la matrimony. She made no response in words, or else; but the hot crimson dyed her cheeks, as she contrasted it with a certain other kiss bestowed by him on somebody else not long before; *that* was passionate enough; rather too much so. Had he noticed, he might have seen his wife press her hand sharply upon her bosom; as if she might be trying to hide its tumultuous throbbing.

"And how does the house get on, Robert?" asked Mrs. Chester, lifting her head to speak.

"Slower than ever. You'll have us here until Christmas, Penelope, according to the present look-out."

"I hope I shall; although Clara"—turning towards her—"does seem in a fidget to get back."

Clara seemed in a fidget about nothing, just then; she was sitting perfectly still, her face and her eyes cast down. Robert Lake ran on, in his own fashion, turning his attention upon the dressmaker now.

"Working for your life as usual, Miss Cooper! What is that you are cutting out? A pair of pantaloons for me?"

"It's a pair of sleeves, sir."

"Oh, sleeves; I feared they'd hardly be large enough. By the way, when is that inquest to be brought to an end?"

"I wish I knew, sir," she answered.

"And nothing has been decided in regard to your brother yet!"

"No, sir. It is very hard."

"It is very strange," returned Mr. Lake—"strange there should be this contradiction about the lights. Each side is so positive."

"I am quite certain, sir, that Matthew would

not say what was untrue, even to save himself; therefore, when he says it was the green light up, I know it was the green."

"Precisely the same thing that I tell everybody. I have unlimited faith in Cooper."

"And there's Colonel West to bear out what he says, you know, sir. The colonel would not say the green light was up, if it was not."

"No. But then, again, Oliver Jupp and the station people maintain it was the red," said Mr. Lake, remarking upon the fact that had puzzled him all along. "For my part, I think there was a little sleight of hand going on. Some conjurors must have been there in disguise. Now gentlemen and ladies, walk up; the performance is just going to begin. The celebrated Signor Confusiani has taken his place, and is entering on his mysteries. He transforms colours by the help of his magic wand. In looking at the green, you perceive it change to red; in looking at the red, it at once passes into blue."

They all laughed, except Clara. She sat still as before, her eyes fixed on the fire.

"You see, sir, the worst of it is that Matthew is kept out of employment all this time," said Miss Cooper. "They have suspended him. He

and his poor young wife are at their wits' end nearly, over it. Two months now, and not a shilling coming in."

"Yes, it is very bad," returned Mr. Lake, speaking seriously for once. "There's a baby too, is there not?"

"Yes, sir. Three weeks old."

"I suppose you give them your earnings."

"I give them what I can, sir; but I have my mother to keep."

"Ah," concluded Mr. Lake, abandoning the subject. "Have you been for a walk to-day, Clara?"

"No."

"You ought to take her, Robert; she scarcely ever goes out now. You might have come back earlier and done it. Lady Ellis did not have a walk to-day, failing you. Why did you not come sooner?"

"Couldn't manage it, Mrs. Chester.

"But—when *did* you come?" suddenly resumed Mrs. Chester, after a pause of thought. "You must have come back in the afternoon. There's no train at this hour."

"Oh, they put on a special one for me."

"Don't be stupid," retorted Mrs. Chester. "You must have been back some time."

"Have it your own way, Penelope, and perhaps you'll live the longer."

"Uncle Robert, you know you were back ever so long ago," interposed Fanny Chester, who had just come into the room. "You have been staying in the garden with Lady Ellis."

"What's that?" cried Mr. Lake.

"I saw you. You were both of you going towards the shrubbery."

He caught hold of the little speaker by the waist, and swung her round. "That's the way you see ghosts, is it, Miss Fanny! Take care they don't run away with you! How could you see me in the shrubbery, pray, if I was not there."

"Be quiet, Uncle Robert; put me down. Mamma there's a good fire in the parlour now, and the tea-tray is carried in. And Miss Cooper, I was to tell you they are waiting tea for you in the kitchen."

Mrs. Chester, shaking the threads from her black gown, left the room, Fanny went with her, and Miss Cooper followed. Tea was a thankful boon to the weary, hard-worked dressmaker. Anna never quitted her work until the last minute, and sat on, drawing one of the candles a little

nearer to her. Robert Lake began speaking to his wife of the progress of their house; or rather, the non-progress. Clara—the one dreadful certainty giving rise to other suspicions—wondered whether he had bribed the men to retard it. He had not done that, however; he was not one to commit wrong deliberately.

"Seriously speaking, Clara, I do think we shall not get back before Christmas."

She had determined upon saying something; what, she hardly knew. But when she tried to speak, the violent agitation that the effort brought, impeded all utterance. And perhaps the presence of Anna Chester acted as a restraint. She glanced up at him and opened her lips; but no words came; her throat was beating, her breath troubled.

"Clara! you have turned quite white. Are you ill?"

"I—I feel cold," was all she could say.

"It is a cold, nasty night," remarked Mr. Lake, giving no further thought to the matter, or supposing that there was cause to give it. "The tea is ready, I think; that will warm you."

He took one of the candles off the table and

went to his room to wash his hands. Anna Chester laid down her work and approached Clara.

"Dear Mrs. Lake, something is troubling you," she said in her gentle manner, as her sweet eyes glanced deprecatingly at that care-betraying face. "Can I do anything for you—or get you anything? Shall I bring you some tea up here?"

"Hush, Anna! No, it is nothing—only that I am cold. Thank you all the same."

"You are looking so pale. Pale and sad."

"I don't think I have been very well lately, Anna. Let me be quiet, my dear, for a few minutes, will you? my head aches."

Anna Chester, with the delicacy innate in her, quitted the room, setting things a little straight on the work-table in passing it. When Mr. Lake came back, Clara was sitting just as he had left her. Putting down the candle, he came close up, making some trifling remark.

She would have given the world to be able to say a word to him; to ask whether she was to be *second* in his heart; second to that woman; but she simply dared not. Her agitation would have become unbearable, and ended in an hysterical scene.

"Are you not coming to tea, Clara?"

"Presently."

He looked at her with a keen eye. She was odd, he thought.

"What's the matter, Clara? You seem dull, this evening."

There was no answer. Mrs. Lake had her hand pressed upon her throat and chest, striving, though he knew it not, to still the agitation that all but burst its bounds.

"Where is the book?" she presently asked.

"What book?"

"The one you were to bring for me; that you forgot last time."

"Oh, to be sure; here it is," he said, taking it from his coat pocket. "I did not forget it this time, you see."

"You might have brought it to me when you first got back," she reproachfully said.

"Well, I have not been back long. You are shivering; what makes you so cold?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Perhaps you have been asleep; one does shiver sometimes on waking. Come along, Clara; tea will do you good."

She rose and followed him down. Mrs. Ches-

ter was pouring out the tea, and Lady Ellis, in her black silk gown with its low body and short sleeves, and the ruche of white crape, causing her to look girlish, years younger than she was, sat on the sofa. She had several evening dresses, but they were all black, and all made in the same simple style. Sir George had not been dead twelve months yet; but she had never worn a regular widow's cap—it would have spoilt her hair, she told them. The pretty white net things she wore in a morning were but an apology for one. Very fine, very silky and beautiful did her purple-black hair look that night, and Robert Lake playfully touched it as he sat down beside her.

The children's meal-table, at which Anna Chester used to preside in a little room, was done away with, the two boys having gone to school, so that Anna and Fanny were present as usual this evening. There was plenty of talking and laughing, and Clara's silence was not noticed—save perhaps by Anna Chester.

After tea, when Anna and Fanny were gone away again, Mr. Lake and Lady Ellis began chess: in one way or other they generally monopolized each other's evenings. Sometimes it

would be with music; sometimes at écarté, which she had taught him; often at chess. The small table was drawn out, and they sat at it apart. Mrs. Chester was doing some embroidery-work this evening; Clara sat alone by the fire reading; or making believe to read.

But when she was unobserved the book dropped on her lap. Nobody was looking at her. Mrs. Chester's profile was towards her, but she was fully engrossed with her work; her husband's back was turned. Only Lady Ellis was in full view, and Clara sat studying her face and the glances of her large and flashing eyes.

How long silence had reigned, except for the remarks exchanged now and again between the chess-players, perhaps none of them could have told, when one of those subtle instincts, alike unaccountable and unexplainable, caused Mrs. Chester to turn suddenly to Clara Lake. What she saw made her start.

"Clara! What is the matter?"

Mr. Lake turned quickly round and regarded his wife. The book lay on her knee, her cheeks were scarlet as with incipient fever, her whole frame was shaking, her eyes were wild. That she was labouring under some extraordinary

attack of terror appeared evident to all. He rose and came up.

"You are certainly ill, my dear!"

Ill, agitated, frightened—there could be no question of it. Not at once did she speak; she was battling with herself for calmness. Mrs. Chester took her hand. Lady Ellis approached with dark and wondering eyes. Clara put her hands before her own.

"It is a nervous attack," said Mrs. Chester. "Go and get some wine, Robert, or some brandy."

He was going already, before she told him, and brought back both. Clara would take neither. Awfully vexed at having caused a scene, the mortification enabled her to throw off the symptoms of illness, except the shivering. Lady Ellis, with extreme bad taste, slipped her hand within Mr. Lake's arm as they stood watching her. He moved forward to speak, and so dropped it.

"You must have caught cold, I fear, Clara. Had you not better take something warm and go to bed?"

She lifted her eyes to his, and answered sharply—sharply for her.

"I shall not go to bed. I am well now."

"Colds are sooner caught than got rid of, Clara. If you have taken one——"

"If I have, it will be gone in the morning," came the sharp interruption. "Pray do not let me disturb your game."

Contriving to repress the shivering by a strong effort of will, she took up her book again. They returned to the chess-table, Mrs. Chester went on with her embroidery, and so the night went on: Clara, outwardly calm, reading sedulously—inwardly shaking as though she had an ague-fit. Even to herself it was evident that she had caught a violent cold.

"I shall send you a glass of white wine whey," spoke Mrs. Chester, when Clara at length rose to go upstairs, declining to partake of the refreshments brought in. "And mind you lie in bed in the morning. There's no mistake about the cold."

"How *could* she have caught it?" exclaimed Lady Ellis, with a vast display of sympathy; and Clara bit her tongue to enforce silence, for she could scarcely forbear telling her. My lady, taking her unawares, gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Drink the whey quite hot, my dear Mrs. Lake."

Clara, her mind full of Judas the false and *his* kiss, went upstairs alone; she preferred to do so, she told them, and shut herself in her own chamber. When Elizabeth appeared with the white wine whey, and left it, she noticed that her mistress had not begun to undress.

Neither had she when Mr. Lake came up, nearly an hour afterwards. They had lingered in the dining-room—he, Mrs. Chester, and Lady Ellis. He was very much surprised. She sat by the fire, wrapped in a shawl, with her feet on the fender.

"Why, Clara, I thought you were in bed and asleep!"

There was no answering remark. Mr. Lake, thinking her manner more and more strange, laid his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"Clary, what ails you to-night?"

She shrank away from his hand, and replied to his question by another.

"Why is it that our house is not ready?"

"That is just what I asked of the workmen to-day, lazy dogs!"

"We can go back to it as it is. Some of the rooms are habitable. Will you do so?"

"What in the world for?" he demanded. "We are very comfortable here, Clara; and, between ourselves, it is a help to Penelope."

"We must go back. I cannot stay."

"But why? Where's the motive?"

She drew her shawl closely round her as if she shivered again, and spoke the next words with a jerk, for to get them out required an effort of pain. What it had taken to nerve her to this task so far, she alone knew.

"What is there between you and Lady Ellis?"

"Between me and Lady Ellis!" echoed Mr. Lake, with all the carelessness in life. "Nothing at all. What should there be?"

She bent towards him and whispered.

"Which is it—which is it *to be*, I or she?"

"To be—for what?" rejoined Mr. Lake, really at a loss.

"Which of us is it that you love?" she wailed forth; and indeed the tone of her voice could be called little else than a wail.

"Clara, you are growing foolish."

"Don't put me off in this false way," she vehemently uttered, roused to passion by his indifference. "Why are you always with her, steal-

ing walks and interviews?—why do you give to her your impassioned kisses, and call her by endearing names? Robert, you will kill me!"

He put the heel of his boot on the bars to push down a piece of refractory coal, probably debating with himself what he should answer.

"Considering that you are my wife, Clara, and that Lady Ellis is but a chance acquaintance, I think you might be above this nonsense."

"Have you forgotten my dream?" she resumed, in a low tone. "Have you forgotten that my coming to this house seemed to shadow forth my death?"

"That dream again, of all things!" exclaimed Mr. Lake in open surprise, involuntary sarcasm in his tone. "I thought it was done with and dismissed."

"I have been thinking of it all the evening."

"Then I'd not confess it," he said, dropping either by accident or in temper the hair-brush he had taken in his hand. "And the notion of my kissing Lady Ellis! and calling her—what did you phrase it?—endearing names? That's the best joke I have heard lately."

She fixed her gaze steadfastly upon him; there was something in it which seemed to say

she could convict him of falsehood, if she chose; and his eyes fell beneath hers.

"What has come over you, Clary? You must be turning jealous! I never knew you so foolish before."

"No," she answered, in a tone of pain, "never before, never before."

"And why now? There's no occasion for it."

"I will not descend to explanation or reproach," she said, after a pause; "you may ask your own conscience how much of the latter you merit. I shall go home to-morrow; I dare not stay in this house with that woman. Do you understand me, I *dare not*. You can accompany me if—if—— Robert, you must choose between us."

He did not speak for a minute or two; and when he did, it was in a careless tone, as though he wished to make light of the matter altogether.

"Of course if you have made up your mind to return to an uncomfortable home, half pulled down, we must do so. I am sorry for the caprice, for we shall be choked with paint and dust."

"Very well. We go to-morrow. I will send

Elizabeth over early in the morning, to get things straight for us."

She rose as she spoke, and began to undress. His eyes fell upon the tumbler. Taking it up he held it to the light.

"I do believe this is your whey! It is quite cold. To drink it like this would do you no good."

"Oh, what does it signify?" she answered; as if that and all things else were utterly indifferent to her.

Mr. Lake quitted the room without speaking. By and by he came back with another glassful, quite hot.

"Now, Clara, drink this."

She refused at first; it would do her no good, she said; but Mr. Lake insisted upon it. He was her husband still, and could exact obedience.

But the morrow brought no journey for Mrs. Lake. It brought illness instead. With early morning Mr. Lake got up and aroused the house, saying that his wife was ill. She had awoke so exceedingly suffering—her breath impeded, her face and eyes hot and wild—as to alarm him. Mrs. Chester hastened to her bedside, and the

nearest doctor was summoned in haste and brought to the house. He pronounced the malady to be inflammation of the chest and lungs, and forbade her to attempt to leave her bed. He inquired of Mrs. Lake if she knew how she had taken it, and she told him, after a pause of hesitation, that she had gone out of doors from a warm room the previous evening, without putting anything on, and the damp cold must have struck to her.

Yes; it was so. As the sight she had gone out to witness struck a chill to her heart, so did the cold and damp strike a chill to her frame. Once before, five or six years ago, she had caught a similar chill, and inflammation had come on in the same rapid manner. The doctor observed that she must be especially predisposed to it, and privately inquired of Mrs. Chester whether any of her relatives had died of consumption. "Yes," was the answer, "her mother and her brother."

Mr. Lake went to Katterley and brought back the gentleman who had attended her from infancy, Dr. Marlow, an old man now. He was a personal friend of theirs as well as medical attendant. He saw no cause for anxiety, he said

to Mr. Lake; that she was very ill there was no doubt, but not, he thought, ill unto danger.

"She has a good constitution, she has a good constitution," urged Mr. Lake, his tone of anxiety proving that he wished to be reassured upon the point.

"For all I have ever seen to the contrary," replied Dr. Marlow. "She must be more prudent for the future, and not subject herself to sudden changes of temperature."

"She found the drawing-room very hot, and went from it into the cold night-air. It opens with glass doors. And if you remember, doctor, last night was raw and foggy. At least, it was so here; I don't know what it may have been at Katterley."

So spoke Mr. Lake. But it never entered into his carelessly-constituted mind to wonder *why* his wife had gone out; or whether, having gone out, she might by some curious chance have come unsuspected across the path of himself and another.

For three weeks Mrs. Lake never left her bed. The inflammation had taken strong hold upon her. A nice time of it those two must have had downstairs! Robert Lake, genuinely sorry for

her illness in itself, for her prolonged seclusion, was quite an exemplary attendant, and would pass half an hour together in the sick-chamber, indemnifying himself by several half-hours with somebody else. Mrs. Chester of course saw nothing; nobody on earth could be more conveniently blind where her interest was concerned, and it would be unprofitable to her to lose or to offend Lady Ellis. Clara lay and *imagined* all that might be taking place, the sweet words, the pretty endearments, the confidential interchange of feeling and thought: it was not precisely the way to get better.

The maid Elizabeth was her chief attendant; Anna Chester sat with her often. Mrs. Chester, bustling and restless in a sick room as she was elsewhere, was better out of the chamber than in it. To none of these did Clara speak of her husband; but when Fanny ran in, as she did two or three times a day, Clara would ask questions if nobody was within hearing.

"Where's Mr. Lake, Fanny?"

"Oh! he's downstairs in the drawing-room."

"What is he doing?"

"Talking to Lady Ellis."

The answers would vary according to circum-

stances; and Fanny, too young for any sort of suspicion, was quite ready and willing to give them. "He is reading to Lady Ellis;" or "He is out with Lady Ellis;" or "He and Lady Ellis are sitting together by the fire-light;" just as it might chance to be. Twice Lady Ellis went with him to Katterley, and gave Mrs. Lake on her return a glowing account of how quickly the house was getting on now.

Well, the time wore away somehow, and Mrs. Lake got better and took to sit up in her room. The first time she went downstairs was an evening in November. She did not go down then by orders; quite the contrary. "Not just yet," the doctor had told her in answer to an inquiry; "in a few days." But she felt very, very dull that afternoon, sitting alone in her chamber. Mrs. Chester and Anna were busy downstairs, making pickles—in the very kitchen that Clara had seen so minutely in her dream; Elizabeth had gone on an errand to Katterley, taking Fanny Chester, and Robert did not come up. She knew he was at home and sat feverishly expecting him, but he never came. Very lonely felt she, very dispirited; tears filled her eyes repeatedly, uncalled for; and so it went on to

dusk. Had everybody abandoned her? she thought, sitting there between the lights.

The shadows of the room, only lighted by its fire, threw their sombre darkness across, taking curious shapes. A long narrow box, containing ferns and seaweed, stood on a stool in front of the hearth; as the shadow of it grew deeper on the opposite wall in the rapidly fading daylight, it began to look not unlike a coffin. As this fancy took possession of her, the remembrance of her dream with all its distressing terror suddenly flashed into her mind; she grew nervous and timid; too frightened to remain alone.

Wrapping herself up in a grey chenille shawl, as warmly as her husband had wrapped another that recent bygone night, she prepared to descend. She was fully dressed, in a striped green silk, and her pretty hair was plainly braided from her brow. The lovely face was thin and pale; the dark eyes were larger and sadder than of yore; and she was very weak yet.

Too weak to venture down the staircase alone, as she soon found. But for clinging to the balustrades, she would have fallen. This naturally caused her movements to be slow and quiet. She looked into the dining-room first; it was all

in darkness; then she turned to the drawing-room, and pushed open the half-closed door. Little light was there, either; only what came from the fire, and that was low. Standing over it she discerned two forms, which, as she slowly advanced with her tottering steps, revealed themselves as those of her husband and Lady Ellis. She was in her usual evening attire: the black silk gown with the low body and short sleeves, and some black ribbons floated from her hair. Mr. Lake's hand was lightly resting on her neck; ostensibly playing with the jet chain around it, and touching her fair shoulder. Talking together, they did not hear her entrance.

"You know, Angeline," were the first words audible—when at that moment he seemed to become conscious that some one had entered to disturb the interview, and turned his head. Who was it? Some muffled figure. Mr. Lake strained his eyes as it came nearer, and sent them peering through the semi-darkness. The next moment he had sprung at least five yards from "Angeline."

"Clara! How could you be so imprudent? My dear child! you know you ought not to have left your room."

Pushing aside Lady Ellis with, it must be confessed, little ceremony, he dragged a couch to the warmest corner of the hearth, and took his wife in his sheltering arms. Placing her upon it, he snatched up a cloth mantle of Mrs. Chester's that happened to be near, and fenced her in with it from the draught, should there be any. Then he sat down on the same sofa, edging himself on it, as if he would also be a fence for her against the cold. That his concern and care were genuine, springing right from his heart, there could be no question. My Lady Ellis, standing on the opposite side to recover her equanimity, after having stirred the fire into a blaze, and looking on with her great black eyes, saw that.

He bent his head slightly as he gazed on his wife, waiting in silence, not saying a word further until her breath was calmer. Very laboured it was just then, perhaps with the exertion of walking down, perhaps with mental emotion.

"Now tell me why you ventured out of your room," said he, making a prisoner of one of her hands, and speaking in a tender tone.

"I was dull: I was alone," she panted.

"Alone! dull! Where's Penelope? where's

Anna? I thought they were with you. Elizabeth, what is she about?"

She did not explain or answer. She lay back quietly as he had placed her, her eyes closed, and her white face motionless. For the first time Robert Lake thought he saw a look of DEATH upon it, and a strange thrill of anguish darted through him. "What a fool I am!" quoth he to himself, the next moment; "it's the reflection of that fire."

"My dear Mrs. Lake, I should only be too happy to sit with you when you feel lonely," spoke Lady Ellis, as softly as her naturally harsh voice would allow. "But you never will let me, you know."

Clara murmured some inaudible answer about not giving her trouble, and lay quiet where her husband had placed her. He kept her hand still; and she let him do it. He stole quick glances at her wasted features, as if alarm had struck him. She never lifted her eyes to either of them.

The announcement of dinner and Mrs. Chester came together. When that lady saw who was in the drawing-room lying on the sofa, like a picture of a ghost more than a living woman, she set up

a commotion. What did Clara mean by it? Did she come out of her room on purpose to renew her illness? She must go back to it again. Clara simply shook her head by way of dissent, and Mr. Lake interposed, saying she should stay if she wished: she would get no harm in the warm room.

They went in to dinner. Not Clara; what little solid food she could take yet was eaten in the middle of the day. There was a fowl on the table; and Mr. Lake, leaving his own dinner to get cold, prepared to carry a piece of it to his wife.

"It will be of no use," said Mrs. Chester to him, in rather a cross tone, as if she thought the morsel was going to be wasted; but he quitted the room, paying no attention.

He found his wife in a perfect paroxysm of tears, sobbing wildly. Left alone, her long pent-up feelings had given way. Putting the plate on the table, he bent over her—

"My dearest, this will never do. Why do you grieve so? What is the matter?"

"Oh, you know! you know!" she answered.

There was a dead pause. She employed it in smothering and choking down her sobs;

he in any reflection that might be agreeable to him.

"I want to go home."

"The very instant that you may go with safety, you shall go," he readily assented. "If the doctor says you may go to-morrow, Clara, why we will. I must not have my dear little wife grieve like this."

No response. She seemed quite exhausted.

"I have brought you a bit of fowl, Clara; try and eat it."

She waved it away, briefly saying she could not touch it: she could not eat. She waved him away, telling him to go to his dinner. Mr. Lake simply put the plate down again, and stood near her.

"I must go home. I shall die if I stay here."

"Clara, I *promise* that you shall go. What more can I say? The house is sufficiently habitable now; there's nothing to detain us. Settle it yourself with the doctor. If he says you may travel to-morrow, so be it."

She closed her eyes—a sign that the contest was over. Mr. Lake carried the plate of fowl back to the dining-room, not feeling altogether upon the best terms with himself. For the

first time he was realizing the fact that his wife's full recovery might be a more precarious affair than he had suspected.

"I knew she'd not touch it," said Mrs. Chester; "though I think she might eat it if she would."

"Surely she is not sulky!" spoke Lady Ellis, in an under-tone, to Mr. Lake, turning her brilliant and fascinating eyes upon him, as he sat down in his place beside her.

He was not quite bad. He cared for his wife probably as much as he had ever done, although he had become enthralled by another, according to his light and unsteady nature. A haughty flush darkened his brow, and he pointedly turned from Lady Ellis without answering.

"It is the breast of the fowl wasted," cried thrifty Mrs. Chester, in her vexation.

It was not wasted. Mr. Lake took it upon his own plate, and made his dinner off it, never speaking a word all the while to anybody.

What of that? With her wiles and her sweet glances, my lady won him round again to good-humour; and before the meal was over he was as much her own as ever. But when the dessert was put on the table—consisting of a dish of

apples and another of nuts—Mr. Lake left them to it, and went back to his wife.

She lay on the sofa all the evening. Mrs. Chester grumbled at the imprudence; but Clara said it was a change for the better: she was so tired of her bedroom. Her husband waited upon her at tea—a willing slave; and Clara really said a few cheerful words. Lady Ellis challenged him to chess again afterwards. Mrs. Chester and Anna sat by Clara.

"Very shortly," said the doctor, the following morning, in answer to the appeal which Mr. Lake himself made. "Yearning for home, is she? I fancied there was something of the sort. Not to-day: perhaps not to-morrow; but I think you may venture to take her the following one, provided the wind's fair."

"All right," was the answer. "Tell her so yourself, will you, my good sir?"

Clara was told accordingly. And on the third day, sure enough, the wind being fair and soft for November, Mr. and Mrs. Lake terminated their long sojourn at Guild, and returned to Katterley.

Home at last! In her exhilaration of spirit, it seemed just as though she had taken a renewed lease of happy life.

CHAPTER IX.

COLOUR BLINDNESS.

The difference of opinion touching the lights at the railway station on the night of the fatal accident, continued to create no small sensation. The jury turned nearly rampant; vowing they'd not attend the everlastingly adjourned inquest, and wanting every time to return no verdict at all, say they could not, and have done with it. The coroner told them that was impossible; though he avowed that he did not see his way clearly out of it. But for being the responsible party, he would have willingly pitched the whole affair into the sea.

Over and over again did the public recount the circumstances one with another. When anybody could get hold of a stranger, hitherto in happy ignorance, he thought himself in luck, and went gushingly into all the details. It was a stock-in-trade for the local newspapers; and two

of them entered on a sharp weekly controversy in regard to it. In truth, the matter, that is the conflict in the evidence, was most remarkable. That one party should stand to it the lights were red, and that the other should maintain they were green, was astonishing from the simple fact that both sides were worthy of credit. In the earlier stage of the enquiry the coroner had significantly remarked upon the "hard swearing somewhere:" it seemed more of a mystery than ever on which side that reproach could attach to. The jury could arrive at no decision, and thus the inquest had been adjourned time after time, and now the county was getting tired of it. Cooper, meanwhile suspended from employment, stood a chance of being reduced to straits if it lasted much longer. The colonel and Oliver Jupp, who had become intimate, made rather merry over it when they met, each accusing the other of having "seen double;" but neither would give way an inch. The lawyers were confounded, and knew not which side to believe; neither of the two gentlemen had the slightest personal interest in the matter; they spoke to further the ends of justice alone, and the one and the other were alike worthy of credit.

Affairs were in this unsatisfactory state, when a gentleman arrived in the neighbourhood on a short sojourn, a Dr. Macpherson, LL.D., F.R.S., and so on; about seventeen letters in all he could put after his name if he chose to do it. He was a man great in science, had devoted the most part of his life to it, no branch came amiss to him; he had travelled much and was renowned in the world. Amidst other acquirements he had phrenology at his fingers' ends, being as much at home in it as we poor unlearned mortals are in reading a newspaper; or as Mr. Lake was in making himself agreeable to a pretty woman.

They were staying at the "Rose Inn," at Guild, this learned gentleman and his wife. Professor Macpherson (as he was frequently called) had come down on some mission connected with geology. He was a very wire of a man, tall and thin as a lamp-post, exceedingly near-sighted, even in his silver-rimmed spectacles that he constantly wore; a meek, gentle, utterly simple-minded man, whose coats and hats were threadbare, a very child in the ways of the world; as these excessively abstruse spirits are apt to be.

Mrs. Macpherson was in all respects his opposite: stout in figure, fine in dress, loud in speech;

and keen in the affairs of common life. Good hearted enough at the main, but sadly wanting in refinement, Mrs. Macpherson rarely pleased at first; in short, not to mince the matter, she was undeniably vulgar. Mrs. Macpherson's education had not been equal to her merits; her early associations were not of the silver-fork school. She was a very pretty girl when Caleb Macpherson (not the great man he was now) married her; habit reconciles us to most things, and he had discovered no fault in her yet. That she made him a good wife was certain, and a very capable one.

This was the second visit Professor Macpherson had made to Guild. The first took place about half a dozen years ago, when he had come on a question of "pneumatics." He had then become acquainted with the Reverend Mr. Chester, not himself unlearned in science, and had spent several hours of three separate days at the rectory. James Chester had gone now where science probably avails not; Mrs. Chester had quitted the rectory; and it might have chanced that the acquaintanceship would never have been renewed but for an accidental meeting.

Mrs. Chester was walking quickly into Guild

on an errand when she met him. He would have passed her; her style of dress was altered—and for the matter of that he always went (as his wife put it) mooning on, his head in the skies and looking at nobody. But Mrs. Chester stopped him. Except that he looked taller and thinner, and his coat a little more thread-bare than of old, and his spectacles staring out straighter up at the clouds or at the far-off horizon, he was not altered.

"Have you forgotten me, Dr. Macpherson?"

It took the doctor some few minutes to bring himself and his thoughts down to the level of passing life. Mrs. Chester had to tell him who she was, and that she was now alone in the world. He took both her hands in his then, and spoke a few words of genuine sympathy, with the sorrowful look in his kind eyes, and the tone of true pity coming from his ever-open heart.

"You will come and call on me, will you not?" she asked, after telling him where she lived.

"I'll come this evening," he said, "and bring my wife. She's with me this time."

So Mrs. Chester went home and told Lady Ellis of the promised visit. That lady, who had been fit to die of weariness since the departure

of Mr. Lake, welcomed it eagerly; on the principle that even an old professor with seventeen letters beyond his name was of the man-species, and consequently better than nobody.

"I don't know his wife," spoke Mrs. Chester. "She is rather exclusive, most likely. The wife of a man who has made so much noise in the world may look down upon us."

Lady Ellis raised her black eyebrows and had a great mind to tell Mrs. Chester to speak for herself; *she* was not accustomed to be looked down upon.

"Does the wife wear a threadbare gown?" she asked, having heard the description of the professor's coats.

"Very likely," said Mrs. Chester. "She need not, you know; they are rich."

"Rich, are they?"

"Very rich—now. In early life they had to pinch and screw, and live without a servant. Dr. Macpherson told us about it."

"He is not above confessing it, then?"

"He!" Mrs. Chester laughed. The simple professor, being "above" confessing anything of that sort, was a ludicrous idea. She attempted to describe him as he was.

"My dear Lady Ellis, you can have no notion of his simplicity—his utter unworldliness. In all that relates to learning and that sort of thing he is of the very keenest intellect; sharp; but in social life he is just a child. He would respect a woman who has to wash up her dishes herself just as much as he would if she kept ten servants to do it for her. I don't believe he can distinguish any difference."

"Oh!" concluded Lady Ellis, casting a gesture of contempt on the absent and unconscious professor.

Dr. Macpherson meanwhile, immediately after parting with Mrs. Chester, put his hand in his pocket for his case of gradients—or whatever the name might be—and found he had not got it. To go geologizing or botanizing without it would have been so much waste of time, and he turned back to the "Rose." It was well for the evening visit that he did so; but for telling his wife at once while it was fresh in his head, they had never paid it; for the professor would have forgotten all about it in half an hour.

Mrs. Macpherson sat fanning herself at the window. She was a stout woman, comely, red-faced, and jolly; and the fire was large, throwing

out a great heat. Her face and that of her pale thin husband's presented a very contrast. She wore a bright green silk gown, garnished with scarlet, and scarlet bows in her rich lace cap.

"I forgot my case, Betsy," said he, on entering.

"'Twouldn't be you, prefessor, if you didn't forget some'at," returned she, equably. "For a man who has had his head filled with learning, you be the greatest oaf I know."

Accustomed to these compliments from his wife—meekly receiving them as his due—Dr. Macpherson took up his case, a thick pocket-book apparently, the size of a small milestone. He then mentioned his meeting with Mrs. Chester, and the promised evening visit, which was received favourably.

"It'll be a godsend," said Mrs. Macpherson. "With you over them writings of yours, and me a-nodding asleep, the evenings here is fearful dull. Is the invite for tea and supper?"

Rather a puzzling question. Tea and supper were so little thought of by the professor, that but for his wife he might never have partaken of either; and he had to consider for some moments before he could hit upon any answer.

"I don't think it is, Betsy; I only said I'd call."

"Oh!" returned Mrs. Macpherson, ungraciously, for she liked good cheer,—"It'll hardly be worth going for. It's not a party, then?"

The professor supposed not. On these matters of social intercourse his ideas were always misty. He remembered that Mrs. Chester said she had a Lady Ellis visiting her, and mentioned the fact.

Mrs. Macpherson brightened up. "A *Lady* Ellis! Are you sure?"

"Yes; I think I'm sure."

"Well now, Caleb, you look here. We must go properly," said Mrs. Macpherson. "I never was brought into contract with a real live lady in my life; I haven't never had the chance of saying 'your ladyship,' except in sport. We'll have out a chaise and pair, and drive up in it."

Had she proposed to drive up in a chaise and eight, it would have been all one to the professor. Conscious of his own deficiency on the score of sociality (not sociability) and fashion, he had been content this many a year to leave these things to her.

They arrived at Mrs. Chester's about seven. The chaise and pair rattled up to the gate; but

as it was dark night, the pomp of the arrival could not be seen from within, and the gilt was taken off the gingerbread. It happened that Mr. Lake had come over that afternoon—a rather frequent occurrence—and Mrs. Chester had asked him to stay and see the strangers. He and Lady Ellis were at their usual game, chess, and Mrs. Chester was at work close by, when the visitors were announced by Nanny, the names having been given her by the lady—

"Professor and Mrs. Macpherson."

He came in first—the long, thin, absorbed, self-denying man, in his threadbare frock-coat. Mrs. Macpherson had left off fighting against these coats long ago. She ordered him in new ones in vain. As soon as one came home, he would put it on unconsciously, utterly unable to distinguish between that and his old one, and go to his work in it: "his chemical tests, and his proofs, and all that rubbish," as she was in the habit of saying. Somehow he had a knack of wearing his coats out incredibly quick, or else the poisons and the fires did it for him. In a week the new one would be as bad as the rest—shabby and threadbare. Mrs. Macpherson grew tired at last. "After all, it don't much matter,"

was her final conclusion, in pardonable pride. "Good coat or bad coat, he's Prefessor Macpherson." His scanty dark hair was brushed smoothly across his head, his brown eyes, shining through his spectacles, went kindly out in search of Mrs. Chester, who advanced to receive him.

"My wife, ma'am; Mrs. Macpherson."

Mrs. Macpherson came in—a ship in full sail. She had dressed herself to go into the presence of a real live lady. *She* did not travel without her attire, if he did. The forgetful man was apt to start on a journey with nothing but what he stood up in; she took travelling trunks.

An amber satin gown with white brocade flowers on it, white lace shawl, and small bonnet with nodding bird-of-paradise feather, white gloves, flaxen hair. Lady Ellis simply stared while the introductions were gone through and seats were taken. Mrs. Macpherson was free and unreserved in her conversation with strangers, concealing nothing.

"I was as glad as anything when the prefessor said we were coming here fora call this evening," she remarked to Mrs. Chester. "Not knowing a soul in the place, it's naturally dull

for me; and we shall have to stop a week at it, I b'lieve."

"You were not with Dr. Macpherson last time, when I and my late husband had the pleasure of making his acquaintance," observed Mrs. Chester, surreptitiously regarding the bird-of-paradise.

"Not I," answered Mrs. Macpherson. "If I went about always with him, I *should* have a life of it. What with his geographies, and his botanies, and his astronomies, and his chemistries, and his social sciences, and the meetings he has to attend in all parts of the globe, and the country excursions the societies make in a body, he is not much at home."

"This is only the second visit he has paid to Guild, I think?"

"That's all. It's geology this time; last time it was——Prefessor, what's the name of the thing you were down here for last?" broke off Mrs. Macpherson.

"Pneumatics," he answered, looking lovingly at the child, Fanny Chester, and a bit of heath she was showing him.

"Eumatics," repeated Mrs. Macpherson. "Not that I can ever understand what it means.

The name's hard enough, let alone the thing itself."

Perhaps the other ladies were in the same blissful ignorance. Mr. Lake checkmated his adversary, left her to put up the men, and went over to the professor.

Before tea came in they were out in the garden peering about by starlight, the remains of an old Roman wall there, that Mr. Lake happened to mention, keenly exciting the interest of the professor. Mrs. Macpherson was invited to take off her things, and she threw the handsome white shawl aside; but having brought no cap, the bird-of-paradise retained its place. This much might be said for her, that though addicted to very gay clothes, they were always rich and good. Mrs. Macpherson would have worn nothing poor or tawdry.

"How fond they are of these miserable bits of things—pieces of an old wall, strata of earth, wild plants, and such rubbish!" exclaimed Lady Ellis, with acrimony, inwardly vexed that Mr. Lake should have gone out a-roving.

"Rubbish it is—your ladyship's right," spoke Mrs. Macpherson. "Leastways, so it seems to us: but when folks have gifted minds, as the

prefessor has, why perhaps they can see beauties in 'em that's hid to us others."

Not very complimentary on the whole; but Lady Ellis did not choose to see it.

"Of course," she said, "your husband is wonderfully clever; he has a world-wide fame. I heard of him in India."

"Clever on one side, a gander on t'other," said Mrs. Macpherson.

"A gander?"

"Well, you'd not say a goose, I suppose. In his sciences and his ologies, and his chemicals and his other learnings, why he's uncommon; there's hardly his equal, the public says. But take him in the useful things of life, your ladyship, and see what he's good for. Law bless me!"

"Not for much, I suppose," laughed Mrs. Chester.

"I'd be bound that any child of seven would have more sense. But for me helping him to it, he'd never have a meal; no, I don't believe, as I'm an honest woman, that he'd recollect to sit down to one. When he's away from me, he, as I tell him, goes in for trying to live upon air."

"Do you mean that he really tries to see if he can live upon it?"

"Bless you, no. He must know he couldn't. What I mean is, that he neglects his food—either forgets it out and out, or does not find time to sit down to it. And then his clothes! Look at the coat he has got on now."

Neither of the two ladies having particularly noticed the coat, they could not make much answering comment. Mrs. Macpherson, fond of talking, did not wait for any.

"I wonder sometimes what would become of him, and how long he would wear a coat, but for being looked after. Why, till it dropped off his back. I have to put every earthly thing ready for him—even to a pocket-handkercher—and then he can't see them. I used to let him have a chest of drawers to himself, handkerchers in one, gloves and collars in another, shirts in a third, and so on. He'd want, let's say, a neck-tie. Every individual thing would be taken out of every drawer, rucked over, thrown on the floor, and he in quite a state of agitation. Up I'd go, and show it to him. There it would be, staring him in the face, right under his very eyes."

"And he not seeing it?"

"Never. I soon left off letting him have the control of his own drawers. I give him one now, and lock up the rest, so that he has to call me when he wants things. He'll have his spectacles on his nose and be looking after them; his hand might be touching the ink, and he'd not see it. Ah! One might wonder why such useless mortals were born."

"But the professor is so kind and good," observed Mrs. Chester.

"I didn't say he wasn't; I'm not complaining of him," returned the professor's lady, giving a nod to the bird-of-paradise. "One tells these things as one would tell stories of a child that's not responsible for its actions. His brains are too clever, you know, for ordinary life. Thank ye, ma'am; I like it pretty sweet. There again, in the small matter of sugar: put the cup half full, or put in none at all, and it's all one to the professor; he'd never notice the difference."

"I once knew a very clever but very absent man who went to a wedding in his slippers," said Lady Ellis, leaning back in her armchair and speaking languidly for the benefit of the lady opposite. "He had forgotten to put his boots on."

"That's nothing; your ladyship should live for a month with Professor Macpherson. I've quaked in fear before now of seeing him go out without——worse things than boots."

Mrs. Chester laughed; and what further revelations might have been made were put an end to by the entrance of the professor himself and Mr. Lake. They came in talking eagerly, not of the Roman wall, but of the late fatal railway accident. Mr. Lake was giving him the details, and especially those relating to the conflicting nature of the evidence. As soon as Dr. Macpherson had mastered the particulars, he gave it as his opinion that it must be a case of colour-blindness.

"Of colour-blindness?" echoed Mr. Lake.

"Rely upon it, it is a case of colour-blindness on one side or the other," continued the professor, who was now showing himself in his element, the keen man of science, the sensible, sound-judging reasoner. And so well did he proceed to argue the matter, so aptly and clearly did he lay the case before them, that Mr. Lake was half converted; and it was decided that the theory should be followed up.

On the next day the professor was brought

into contact with Colonel West and Oliver Jupp, Mr. Lake having arranged a meeting at his own house. One or two friends were also present. The subject was entered upon, and the professor's opinion given. Oliver Jupp believed he might be right; the colonel was simply astonished at the assertion.

"Not know colours!" cried he. "Not able to tell white from black! Why, what have our eyes been about all our lives, Mr. Professor? My sight is keen and clear; I can answer for that; and I've not heard that there's anything amiss with Mr. Oliver Jupp's."

"It has nothing whatever to do with a keen sight—in the way you are thinking of," returned Dr. Macpherson. "Nay, it frequently happens that those who are afflicted with colour-blindness possess a remarkably good and clear sight. The defect is not in the vision: it lies in the absence of the organ of colour."

"That's logic," laughed the colonel, who had never heard of such a theory, and did not believe many others had.

"Look here," said the professor, endeavouring to put the case in an understandable light "You will allow that men are differently en-

dowed. One man will have the gift of calculation in an eminent degree; he will go through a whole ledger swimmingly, while his friend by his side is labouring at a single column of it: another will possess the organ of music so largely that he will probably make you a second Mozart; but his own brother can't tell one tune from another, and could not learn to play if his very life depended on it: this man will draw you, untaught, plans and buildings of wondrous and beautiful design; that one, who has served his stupid apprenticeship to the art, cannot accomplish a pigsty, fit for a civilized pig to live in—and so I might go on, illustrating examples all. Am I right or wrong?" he concluded, turning his spectacles full on his attentive listeners.

"Right," they all said, including Colonel West.

"Very well," resumed the professor. "Then I would ask you, gentlemen, why should colour be an exception? I mean the capability of perceiving it; the faculty of distinguishing one shade from another?"

There was no immediate answer. The professor went on.

"This brain is totally deficient in the organ of

tune; that one is deficient in some other faculty; a third in something else: why should not the organ of colour sometimes fail?"

"I thought everybody possessed the organ of colour," observed Mr. Lake.

"The greater portion of people do possess it; but there are many who do not."

Colonel West, unconvinced, was rather amused than otherwise. "And you think, sir, that I and Mr. Oliver Jupp do not possess it," he said, laughing.

"Pardon me," replied the professor, laughing also, "I never said you both did not. Had that been the case, you probably would not have been in opposition to each other. But I have been using my own eyes since we stood here, and I see which of you has the defect. One of you possesses the organ of colour (as we call it) in a full degree; the other does not possess it at all. It lies here."

Dr. Macpherson raised his fingers to his eyebrow, and pointed out a spot near its middle. The colonel and Oliver Jupp immediately passed their fingers over their eyebrows, somewhat after the manner of a curious child. Oliver's eyebrows were prominent; the colonel's remarkably flat.

"You can testify by experiment whether I am right or wrong, Colonel West; but I give it as my opinion that you are not able to distinguish colours."

For some moments the colonel could not find his tongue. "I never heard of such a thing in all my life!" cried he. "Do you mean to say that I can see the blue sky" (turning his face upwards), "and not know it's blue?"

"You know it is blue, and call it blue, because you have heard it so called all your life," returned the undaunted professor. "But, if half the sky were blue and half green, you would not be able to say which was the green half and which the blue."

"That caps everything," retorted the colonel, in high good-humour. "It's a pity my wife can't hear this; she'd shake hands with you at once. She has, you must know, a couple of garden parasols: one green, the other blue. If she sends me indoors for the green, she says I bring her the blue; and if for the blue, I bring the green. She sets it down to inattention, and lectures me accordingly."

"You could not have given us a better confirmation that my opinion is correct," said Pro-

fessor Macpherson, glancing at the group around. "Your wife has set this down to inattention, you say, colonel. May I ask what you have set it down to?"

"I? Not to anything. I never troubled myself to think about it."

The learned gentleman rubbed his hands with satisfaction. "What you acknowledge is so true to nature, colonel! Those who, like you, are affected with colour-blindness, can rarely be brought to believe in their own defect. It is a fact that the greater portion of them *are not conscious of it;* they really don't know that they cannot distinguish colours. Some few have perhaps a dim idea that they are not so quick in that particular as others, but they never think of questioning the cause. To use your own expression, it does not trouble them. I understand you maintain that on the night of the accident the usual light was up—green?"

"Yes," said the colonel. "They exhibit the green light always at Coombe Dalton station, to enforce caution, on account of the nasty turning just after passing it. I maintain, as you say, that the customary green light was shown that night."

"Now I will tell you how to account for that belief," said the professor. "It was not so much that you could be sure the *green* light was up, as that you could not distinguish any difference between the one you saw, and the one you were accustomed to see. You could not discern the difference, I say, and therefore you maintained it to be, as you believed, the same one—the green."

"This seems plausible enough, as you state it," acknowledged Colonel West, at length. "But pray why should it not be my young friend, Jupp, who was mistaken—and not I?"

The professor shook his head. "I am quite sure that this gentleman"—indicating Oliver Jupp—"can never be mistaken in colours or in their shades, so long as he retains his eyesight to see anything: he has the organ very largely developed. I am right, colonel," he added, nodding.

"But what do you say to Cooper, the driver?" returned the colonel. "He says the light was green: and everybody agrees that he would only assert what was true."

"What he thought was true," corrected Dr. Macpherson. "There is little doubt, in my

mind, that Cooper's case will turn out to be like your own—a fact of colour-blindness. He could not distinguish the difference in the light from the ordinary light, and therefore believed it to be the same."

"*Both* of us blind!" exclaimed the colonel, with wide-open eyes. "That would be too good, Mr. Professor."

"I said only colour-blind," corrected the professor. "There is not the least doubt that it will turn out to be so."

And he carried the opinions of nearly all present with him. It seemed, indeed, to be the only feasible solution of the difficulty; and so the gentlemen said to each other as they dispersed.

"I promised to take you in to see my wife," whispered Mr. Lake to the man of science, arresting him as he was departing.

Clara was sitting in an easy-chair, a shawl on her shoulders; but she looked up brightly when the professor entered. If the old feeling of secure happiness had not come back again, a portion of it had; and she said to everybody that she was getting well. Mary Jupp was with her. They had felt half scared at the thought of en-

countering familiarly so renowned a man. He turned out to be a very shy and simple one—in manners, at least; and Miss Jupp, in the revulsion of relieved feeling, nearly talked him deaf.

"She's a pretty thing, that young man's wife," observed the professor to Mrs. Macpherson, when he had got back to Guild. "But I'd not like to take an insurance on her life."

"I never knew you had turned doctor, professor."

"It does not require a doctor's eye to see when a blossom's delicate, Betsy. And those delicate blossoms want a vast deal of care."

The strange opinion avowed by Dr. Macpherson, that the matter which had been puzzling the world so long, would turn out to be a case of colour-blindness, excited the wonder of the simple country people. In these rural districts men are content to live without science, and cannot well understand it when it is brought home to them. This opinion, nevertheless, coming from so great an authority, obtained weight with all, causing some commotion; and it was resolved to test the sight of the unfortunate driver, Cooper. Colonel West proposed, half jokingly, half seriously, that his own eyes should also be

tested. It would set the matter at rest in his mind, he said. Mrs. West devoutly wished she could be present, and see the solution of what had been hitherto inexplicable. "I'd used to tell that husband of mine he couldn't see colours," she exclaimed to a select audience, "but I didn't really suppose it was so; I thought he was careless and stupid."

On the evening fixed for the test, those concerned in it assembled at the station of Coombe Dalton. Matthew Cooper came from Katterley in obedience to the summons sent for him. Colonel West, Mr. Lake, Oliver Jupp, the coroner, and some of the jury were present: and others also with whom we have had nothing to do.

The instant that Professor Macpherson cast his eyes on Cooper's face, he found his anticipation verified. The man laboured under the defect of colour-blindness, in even a greater degree than Colonel West.

They proceeded to the trial. Lamps of various colours were in readiness, and the Professor was constituted master of the ceremonies. He commenced his task by running up a light to the signal-post. Colonel West and Cooper stood a

little forward; the coroner and other interested people, official and otherwise, behind; the mob behind them; all at a convenient distance from the lights.

"What light is that?" asked Dr. Macpherson of the two who were on trial, amidst breathless silence.

A momentary pause. Colonel West and Cooper turned their eyes up to the raised lamp; the crowd turned theirs.

"It's green," said the colonel.

"It's red," said Cooper.

And there arose a general laugh. For the lamp was blue.

Two lamps were next run up.

"What are they?" was the demand.

A dead silence ensued. *Neither Cooper nor the colonel could tell.*

"I ask what are the colours of these two lamps?" repeated the professor.

"I think they are green and white," hazarded Cooper, at length.

"And I say they are red and blue," cried the colonel.

They were white and blue.

Then the four lamps were exhibited, green,

red, white, and blue, and the mistakes made by both essayists kept the platform in a roar. The colonel did tell which was the white—but it was probably more of a guess than a certainty. They could distinguish a "difference," they said, between two or more colours when exhibited at once, but were unable to state what that difference was. Both of them were honestly anxious that the test should be fully carried out, and answered to the utmost of their ability. Various colours were exhibited, sometimes two of nearly the same shade: it all came to the same. Long before the experiment came to an end, the fact had been fully established that both Colonel West and Matthew Cooper laboured under the defect of colour-blindness.

"Cooper," said Oliver Jupp, in a good-natured tone, "they must never make an engine-driver of you again."

"Well, I don't know, sir," returned Cooper, who seemed very chapfallen, "if it's true what this strange gentleman says, why—I suppose it is true. But I hope they'll make something else of me; I know I am keen enough at most things. If a man is deficient in one line, he may be all the quicker in another."

"Now you have given utterance to a truism, without perhaps knowing it," interposed the professor, cheerily. "Be assured that where a defect does exist, it is amply made up for by the largeness of some other gift. Never fear that an intelligent man, like you, will want employment, because you are found not suited to the one they placed you on."

"About the worst they could have given him, as it turns out," remarked Oliver Jupp, as he stood aside with the professor out of the hearing of others. "An engine-driver ought, of all men, to be able to distinguish colours."

"There are some of our engine-drivers who do not, though," was the reply, as the professor cautiously lowered his voice. "Several of our worst accidents have occurred from this very fact."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. It is a more frequent defect than would be thought, this absence of the organ of colour, but it is one to which little attention has been hitherto given; a subject that with some excites ridicule. A company engaging an engine-driver would as soon think of testing his capacity for eating a good dinner, as that of being

able to distinguish signal lights. Most essentially necessary is it, though, that drivers, present or future, should undergo the examination."

"It seems so to me," said Oliver. "And always will seem so—after this night's experiment."

"And until such examination is made general, I should change the form of the signal lamps," remarked Dr. Macpherson. "Let the safety signal be of one uniform shape, and small; let the red, or danger signal, be of as different a shape as can be made, and large; so different that it could never fail to catch the eye. For, look you, a head, deficient in the organ of colour, will usually have that of form very much developed: and if a driver could not see the light, he might the form: and so save his train."

"Quite right," said Oliver.

"In many of the railway calamities we read of, you find that a difference of testimony exists as to the colour of the signal exhibited. One side or the other is supposed to swear falsely; just as it has been in this case. But for the testimony of Colonel West, the jury would have returned a verdict against Cooper at once, and convicted him of falsehood. But rely upon it,

the cause, generally speaking, of these conflicting and painful cases lies not in false swearing, but in colour-blindness."

So concluded the professor. And so was concluded the long-adjourned puzzle that had set Coombe Dalton together by the ears. Once more the inquest was called for the last time; and the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death." In the face of the proved defect in Cooper's capacity for distinguishing the different signals, how could they with justice punish him? He was sent forth, a free man so far, but discharged from his employment to begin the world again.

Now, my friendly readers, the above is a bit of honest truth; a fact from the past. It may be that you will not believe it; may feel inclined to cavil at it. But search cases out and mark for yourselves. Blindness to colour is a far more common defect than the world suspects: it has existed—and does exist—in some of the railway-engine guards and drivers.

CHAPTER X.

MARY JUPP'S EXPLOSION.

A FROSTY day in December. Time had gone on, winter had come in: the seasons go their round, whatever the world may be doing.

How grew Clara Lake? Better? Well, she did not seem to grow much better; at any rate, she was not well, and the old doctor at Katterley, who had known her constitution from infancy, appeared puzzled. She dressed, as in her days of health, and went about the house: on fine days would go out for a walk in the sunshine: but she remained weak and debilitated, and could not get rid of her cough.

Compared to the dangerous attack she had at Guild, of course her present state seemed to be a vast improvement. On first coming home, the change for the better appeared to be marvellous; and Mr. Lake, never seeing anything but the bright side of things, congratulated himself that

she was well again. The improvement did not go on as it ought to have gone; but the falling off was so gradual, the increasing degrees of weakness were so imperceptible, that he neither saw nor suspected either. Had any one told him his wife was in a bad way, he had simply stared in amazement. Latterly the inertness, the seeming debility had certainly made itself apparent to him, but only as a dim idea; so little importance did he attach to it, that he set it all down to apathy on his wife's part, and chided her for not "rousing herself." He did not mean to be unkind; never think that of him; for his wife he would have gone through fire and water, as the saying runs; but he was light, unobservant by nature, and careless.

He was enjoying himself immensely. Chiefly dividing his leisure time between Katterley and Guild. To-day he would be at home with his wife, to-morrow with Lady Ellis; the affectionate husband to the one, saying soft nothings (it must be supposed) to the other. Of course he never went for the sake of seeing my lady; certainly not; there was an excuse ever ready. Mrs. Chester had given him this commission, and he must go and report to her; or Mrs. Chester had

given him the other; or she wanted to consult him on her affairs, which were going downwards; or he went over to escort some of the Jupps; or he had business with his tailor; for he had fallen into a freak to employ one who lived at Guild. On one plea or another, a plausible excuse for taking him to Guild never failed.

The fault of this lay partially with Mrs. Chester. Nearly at her wits' end lest Lady Ellis, wearied with the monotony of the house, should leave her; plainly seeing that Mr. Lake's visits were the sole attraction that kept her, Mrs. Chester invented demands upon him to draw him over to Guild. That the confidential footing on which he and Lady Ellis continued was scarcely seemly for a married man, Mrs. Chester completely ignored. She shut her eyes to it; just as she had shut them in the days when Clara was at Guild. I am telling the simple truth of the woman, and things took place exactly as I am relating them. What mattered it to Mrs. Chester whether the wife's feelings were pained, outraged, so long as her own ends were served? Clara was at a safe distance, seeing nothing; and, after all, it was but a bit of passing nonsense between them —there was no real wrong, reasoned Mrs. Chester

in her sophistry. "What the eye does not see the heart cannot rue."

"But Mr. Lake ought not to have given way to her," remonstrates the upright reader. Of course he ought not, everybody knows that; but he liked the pastime. Lady Ellis made herself uncommonly attractive to him, and it never occurred to him to see that she ought not to have done so. She was exacting now; saying to him "You must come to-morrow," or "You must come the next day." They rode together and walked together as before; not so much, because it was winter weather; and they strolled out in the wide gardens in the dim afternoons, and sat alone very much in the drawing-room by twilight.

Unfortunately these pleasant arrangements were not kept from Clara. If she had partially forgotten her jealousy upon returning home, her husband's constant visits to Guild, and the whispers reaching her from thence, brought it back in all its unhappy force. She was not told purposely. Of the Jupps, the only one whose eyes were open to the flirtation going on—that is, to a suspicion that it was deeper than it ought to be, considering that Mr. Lake had a wife—was the eldest of them, Mary. She held her tongue.

But the others, after a day spent at Guild, would jokingly allude in Clara's hearing to the soft hours spent together by him and Lady Ellis, and tell her she ought to keep her husband in better order. They meant nothing. Had Clara been there she might have thought far less of it than she was doing; incertitude always increases suspicion, just as jealousy makes the food it feeds on. So Mrs. Lake sat at home with her cough, and her increasing weakness, and her miserable torture; conscious of little save one great fact, that her husband was perpetually at Guild. Had he gone more openly, as it were, without framing (as he invariably did) some plausible plea for the journey, she had thought less. What could Clara do? Could she descend to say to him, you shall not go there? No; she suffered in silence; but it was killing her.

A bright December morning, clear and frosty, Mrs. Lake was seated at the window in their comfortable room, making tiny little flannel petticoats. There was a good deal of distress in Katterley, and she was intending to give warm garments to sundry poor half-naked children. Stooping over the work, her cheeks had acquired

their hectic tinge, seen frequently now, otherwise the face was pale and thin; the fingers were attenuated. Mr. Lake, who had been looking at the newspaper, reading occasional scraps of news from it to his wife, rose from his chair by the fire and stretched himself.

"How busy you are, little wife! Who on earth are all those small things for?"

"The poor children in the cottages by the brick-fields. They are so badly off, Robert," she added, glancing up, with a pleading look. "I could not help doing something for them."

"All right, my dear; do whatever you like. Only, don't over-work yourself."

"There's no fear of that. Elizabeth will do part of them; and Mary Jupp is coming to help me."

"What a lovely day it is for December!" he added, looking at the sparkling sunlight.

"Very. It almost tempts me to go out."

"I will take you to-morrow, Clara; I must go to Guild to-day."

Mrs. Lake resumed her work with trembling fingers.

"Penelope's watch is at Van Buren's. I promised faithfully to take it to her to-day."

"Are there no watchmakers at Guild, that Mrs. Chester should send her watch to Katterley?"

"I don't know. I brought it to him at her request a fortnight ago. Van Buren has a great name in his trade, you know."

As he spoke he looked at his own watch; it was time to depart.

"Shall you be home to dinner, Robert?"

"No. But I shall to tea. I shall be in by the seven train. Good-bye, Clary."

She raised her face with its crimson hectic colour, the result of emotion, to receive his farewell kiss. Its loveliness could but strike him.

"How well you are getting to look, my darling," he said, tenderly.

And it would no doubt have astonished Mr. Lake excessively could he have glanced back at his wife through the garden and the walls of the house as he went off, gaily whistling. Dropping her work on the floor, she fell into a storm of sobs in her utter self-abandonment. Miss Jupp came in, and so found her.

"Clara! *Clara!*"

Up she got: but to affect indifference was an impossibility. Mary Jupp, greatly shocked, took the sorrowful face in her sheltering arms.

"Tell me what it is, Clara. Open your poor little heart to me, my dear. I am older than you by many years, and have had trouble myself. Where's your husband?"

"Gone to Guild."

"Oh," said Miss Jupp, shortly, who had her private opinion on many things. "Well, dear, he has got a nice day for it."

Clara dried her eyes and stifled her sobs, and sat down to work again.

"I am so stupid," she said, in a tone of apology. "Since my illness I don't feel strong; it makes me cry sometimes."

Mary Jupp said no more, perhaps wisely. She took her things off and remained the day. And Mr. Lake got home, not by seven at night, but by the last train.

Christmas approached, and Mrs. Lake got thinner and weaker. Still her husband suspected nothing amiss. She rose in the morning, went through her duties, such as they were, and had a bright colour. How was he, an unobservant man by nature and habit, to detect that it was all wrong? Had he suspected the truth, none would have been more anxiously troubled than he.

It was in Clara Lake's nature to conceal what was amiss. With these reticent temperaments, a great grief touching the heart, a grief unto death, never can be spoken of. At the last, perhaps, when hours are numbered, but not always then. *He* saws no signs of it: the low spirits, the nervous weakness were given way to when alone; never before him. Except that she had grown strangely still and quiet, he saw no alteration. She tried to be cheerful, and succeeded often.

So the days, as I have said, glided on, bringing the end nearer and nearer. Mr. Lake went on his heedless way, and she sat at home and did silent battle with the anguish that was killing her. Her history is drawing to a close. The world, going round in its hard, matter-of-fact reality, is apt to laugh at such stories; but they are taking place, for all that, in some of its nooks and corners.

One day, when it wanted but three or four to Christmas, Mr. Lake tempted his wife into the greenhouse to see his winter plants. She was more cheerful than customary—talked more; an artificial renovation had brought back some of the passing strength.

"Clary, I have promised to spend Christmas-day with Penelope."

A sudden rush of colour to her wasted cheeks, a pause, and a response that came forth faintly.

"Have you?"

"She said how dull it would be for us at home, and would not take a denial. You will be able to go?"

"I go!" She glanced at him in surprise, and shook her head.

"Why not?"

"I am too ill."

Mr. Lake felt annoyed. The proposed expedition had been presenting itself to his mind in a very agreeable light: for his wife to set her face against it, whether on the plea of ill-health or any other plea, would be especially provoking.

"My dear, I tell you what it is," he said in a voice that betrayed his temper, "you will fancy yourself ill and lie-by and stay at home, until it ends in your being ill."

"Do you think I am well?"

"You are not strong; but if you would rouse yourself, and go more out, and shake off fancies, you would soon become so. An illness, such as yours was in the autumn, leaves its weakening

effects behind it as a matter of course; but there's no sense in giving way to them."

"I go out sometimes."

"Just for a walk or so; that does little good. What you want is cheerful society; change. You have not been once to Guild since we came home."

"You make up for it, then; you are there often enough."

She could not help the retort; it seemed to slip from her tongue unguided. Mr. Lake kicked out at a broken pot.

"Something or other is always happening to take me there. Mrs. Chester loads me with commissions, and I don't like to refuse to execute them."

They went in. Mr. Lake returned to the charge.

"You will go on Christmas-day, Clary, won't you? Penelope is preparing for us."

"No; I am not well enough. And if I were, I should prefer to be at home. Say no more," she added, almost passionately interrupting what he was about to urge. "You ought not to wish me to go there."

A long silence. "I shall go. I must. I can't get off it."

She did not speak.

"What is to be done, Clara? It will never do for me to spend Christmas-day there, and you to spend it at home." And he finished the clause by breaking out, half-singing, half muttering, with the lines of a popular ditty that our childhood was familiar with—

"To morrow is our wedding-day, and all the world would stare
If wife should dine at Edmonton, and I should dine at Ware."

She sat with her hands folded before her, and did not immediately answer. If *he* could not tell what was to be done, or what ought to be done, she would not. Mr. Lake looked at her and waited.

"You must do as you think *right*," she said, laying a slight stress upon the word. "I am too unwell to be anywhere but at home on Christmas-day."

Mr. Lake left the room, whistling to hide his anger. Had he possessed the worst wife in the world he had never reproached or quarrelled with her. Some men *cannot* be actively unkind to women, and he was one. He thought her very obstinate, unreasonably so, and said to himself that he would go to Guild. If Clara did not

come to her senses beforehand and accompany him, his going without her would bring her to them after. Not another word was said between them; each seemed to avoid the subject.

Christmas-day dawned, cloudy but tolerably fine. Mr. Lake was going to Guild. Not doing exactly as he thought *right,* for his conscience was giving him a sharp twinge or two, but following the bias of his inclination, which urged him into the sunshine of my Lady Ellis's smiles. Clara felt worse that morning, dreadfully weak and languid, but she put on her things to attend church. Mr. Lake went with her, and they sat out the service together. At its termination he rose to quit the church; she remained.

"Shall you not be too tired with the long service, Clara?" he whispered. "You had better leave it until another opportunity."

"Please don't! let me stay."

There was something in the pleading words—in the pleading up-turned glance of the wan face, that struck upon him as being strange, leaving a momentarily unpleasant impression. He never stayed the sacrament himself, and went out.

She gathered herself into the corner of their

high, broad, old-fashioned pew, and knelt down, leaning her arms and head on the seat. An intense weariness was upon her frame and spirit; she did not feel things as keenly as she used—it was as if the world were drifting away from her. Her soul was longing for the comfort of the approaching rite—for its *comfort*. Ah, my friends, we kneel periodically at the altar, and take the bread and wine, and hope that we return comforted and refreshed. Believe me, it is but those from whom the comfort of this world has utterly departed who can indeed realize what that other comfort is, and how great our need of it. Only when earth and its interests fail us, when the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl broken—in that hour do we desire the rest from travail, as a yearning longing. That hour had come for Clara Lake: she knelt there, feeling that earth had no longer a place for her,—the home above was ready for her,—the Redeemer at hand to welcome her, and take her to God.

She walked home quietly, a dim consciousness upon her that it might be the last time she should partake of the sacrament here. It was not far off two o'clock, and Mr. Lake was walking about, all impatience, for his train started at

five minutes past. She had thought he would be gone.

"I waited for you, Clary. *Won't* you come with me?"

"Indeed I cannot."

"Then it's a case of Johnny Gilpin."

With a farewell to his wife, full of paraded affection, Mr. Lake took himself off to the station, telling his wife to be sure and eat a good dinner and drink everybody's health in champagne, including his and her own.

In spite of the inward peace that was hers, she was feeling terribly dispirited. A fond thought had delusively whispered that, after all, perhaps he might not go. She remembered the epoch of her dream; how he had stayed at home then in tender consideration of her wishes. Things were altered now.

At three o'clock she sat down to dinner, cutting herself a small slice from the turkey placed before her. When the sauces were brought round she simply shook her head. She had no appetite: an oppressive feeling of bitter grief sat on her spirit; the tears dropped on her plate silently, and she could not control them.

Presently she laid down her knife and fork,

the little bit of meat only half eaten. Elizabeth ventured to remonstrate.

"I can't swallow it; it is like dry chips in my throat."

"And no wonder, ma'am: the meat's dry by itself. And such delicious bread-sauce and gravy that's here."

Sauce or no sauce, gravy or no gravy, Mrs. Lake could not eat. They brought in the pudding. She cut it, eat a mouthful, and sent it away again.

Leaving her to her solitary dessert—for her a mere matter of form—the servants sat down to their own dinner. Some short time had elapsed, when Elizabeth thought she heard a noise in the dining-parlour, and went in to see if her mistress wanted anything. A cry of alarm burst from the girl as she opened the door: Mrs. Lake was lying on the carpet.

Whether she had fainted—whether she had been crossing the room and fell over anything—could not then be ascertained. As the servants raised her, a thin stream of blood issued from her mouth. Nearly beside themselves with terror, they laid her on the sofa, and Elizabeth ran for the doctor. She had to pass Mr. Jupp's

house, and on her return it occurred to Elizabeth to call and ask to see Miss Jupp. That young lady came out to her from the dining-room, her mouth full of turkey.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, half petrified at the news. "Burst a blood-vessel! Dying! Is any one with her besides Mr. Lake?"

"He is not with her—there's nobody with her," answered Elizabeth. "That's why I made bold to disturb you, miss. He is gone off to dine at Mrs. Chester's."

Catching up a garden hat and woollen shawl that hung close at hand, Mary Jupp flung them on without a moment's pause for consideration, and started at a gallop down the street. The worthy shopkeepers, standing at their sitting-room windows, saw the transit with amazement, and thought the eldest Miss Jupp had gone suddenly mad. She was in the house before Dr. Marlow: his old steps were slow at the best—her's fleet. Mrs. Lake had broken a vessel on the chest or lungs.

"There is no immediate danger, as I hope," said the old doctor in Miss Jupp's ear; "but her husband ought to be here." Mary looked at

her watch, and found that she had just time to catch a train.

But that Mary Ann Jupp was a strong-minded female, she might not have cared to go a journey on Christmas-day in the guise she presented. It may be questioned if she as much as gave a thought to her attire, except to remember that there was no time to go home and change it. In addition to being strong-minded, she was also an exceedingly upright-minded, right-feeling young woman, and had for a long while past greatly condemned what was going on—the absurd intimacy between Mr. Lake and Lady Ellis, and his consequent neglect of his wife. *Her* eyes had been open to it if nobody else's had; and Mary Jupp, in her impulsive way, had threatened herself that she should "one day have it out with the lot." That day had come.

Very considerably astonished was Mr. Lake to find himself burst in upon by Mary Jupp. Mrs. Chester and Lady Ellis looked up in amaze. They had dined together, a family party, and Mrs. Chester's children, with Anna and the two Clapperton girls, who were guests that day, had retired to another room to make what noise they pleased, leaving the trio round the comfortable

fire, wine and good things on the table behind them. Miss Jupp walked in without notice or ceremony. Her old red woollen shawl had jagged ends and a slit; her brown hat, white once, was vastly disreputable, and had a notch in the brim. Excited and out of breath, having run all the way from Guild station, she walked straight up to Mr. Lake and spoke.

"Would you see your wife before she dies?"

He had risen and stood in consternation. Mrs. Chester rose. *She* sat still, calmly equable, listening and looking. Mr. Lake's lips turned white as he asked Miss Jupp for an explanation.

It was given in a sharp, ringing tone. Mrs. Lake had been found on the floor in her solitary dining-room, and when they lifted her up blood issued from her mouth. A vessel of some sort had given way. Dr. Marlow was with her, and said that Mr. Lake ought to be found. "Will you go to her?" asked the young lady as she finished her recital; "or shall I go back and take word that you will not?"

"Why do you say that to me?" he asked with emotion.

"My dear Miss Jupp!" struck in Mrs. Chester, in a voice of remonstrance.

"Why do I say it to you?" retorted Mary Jupp, in her storm of angry indignation. "It is time some one said it to you. You have been killing her by inches: yes, I speak to all of you," she added, turning about upon them. "You have been killing his wife by inches: you, Angeline Ellis, with your false and subtle snares; and you, Penelope Chester, with your complacent winking at sin. He is weak and foolish—look at him, as he stands there in his littleness!—but he would scarcely have been wicked, had not you drawn him to it. You wonder that I can thus speak out"—drowning some interrupted words of Mrs. Chester's—"is it right for me to be silent, a hypocritical glosser over of crime, when she is dying? I am an English gentlewoman, with a gentlewoman's principles about me, and I hope some Christian ones: it behoves such to speak out sometimes."

"You are mad," gasped Mrs. Chester.

"*You* have been mad, to allow this conduct in your house—folly, frivolity, much that is bad going on under your very eyes. Had your brother been a single man, it might have been deemed excusable by some: never by me: but he had a fair young wife, and you deliberately

set to work to injure her. You did, Penelope Chester: you knew quite well what you were doing: and to encourage ill by winking at it, is the same thing as committing it. I say nothing more to *you*," she added, turning upon Lady Ellis with ineffable scorn. "You may remember certain words you said to me regarding Mr. Lake and his wife, the first afternoon you came here: I did not understand them then; I do now; and I know that, in that first hour of your meeting, you were laying your toils around him to gain his admiration and wean him from his wife. If you retain a spark of feeling, of conscience, the remembrance of Clara Lake, when the grave shall have closed on her, will be as a sharp iron, ever eating into it."

Lady Ellis rose, her jet-black eyes flashing. "Who are you, that you should dare thus insult me?"

Mary Jupp dropped her tone to one of calmness—mockingly calm it was, considering the scorn that mingled with it. "I have told you who I am: an English gentlewoman amidst gentlewomen: and with such I should think you will never henceforth presume to consort."

Mr. Lake had made no further retort, good or

bad. While they were speaking, he took out his watch, saw that he had time, too much of it, to catch the next train, and quitted the room. Mary Jupp was following. Up started Mrs. Chester.

"If Clara is in the sad state you describe, Mary Jupp, I ought to go to her."

Mary Jupp turned short round and faced them. "I do not pretend to any right of control over your actions; but, were I you, I would at least allow my brother to be alone with his wife in her last hours. You have come between them enough, as it is, Mrs. Chester. The sight of you cannot be pleasant to her."

She quitted the room, condescending to give no farewell to either of those she left in it, and followed in the steps of Mr. Lake, who was already on his way to the station, buttoning his coat as he went, taking care not to catch him up. On the platform, as the train was dashing in, he spoke to her.

"Your accusations have been harsh, Mary."

"What has your conduct been?" she sharply retorted. "I loved your wife, and I feel her unhappy fate as keenly as though it had fallen on one of my own sisters. The world may spare you; it may

flatter and caress you, for it is wonderfully tender to these venial sins of conduct; but you cannot recal to life her whom you vowed before God to love and to cherish."

"Step in. The train is going."

"Not into that carriage—with you. Others are in it, and I might be saying things that they would stare at. My temper is up, to-day."

"First class, miss?" cried an impatient porter. "There's only that there one first-class carriage on."

And Mary Jupp walked away; opened the door of another, which was a third-class, and took her seat in it.

Thus they reached Katterley. Mr. Lake came to the carriage to assist her out, but she simply put his arm away. Her face looked awfully severe as the gaslights fell upon it.

"One moment," he said, arresting her as she was passing. "I do not know what turn your suspicions can have taken; a very free one, as it seems to me. Let me assure you that you are mistaken. On my word of honour as a man there has been nothing; nothing wrong. In justice to Lady Ellis I am bound to say this."

"Justice to Lady Ellis! Don't talk to me

about justice to Lady Ellis," was the young lady's retort. Her temper, as she said, was up, that day. "Think of justice to your wife, rather. You are either a fool or a knave, sir."

"Thank you, Miss Jupp."

"Nothing wrong!" she repeated, returning to the charge. "I don't know what you mean. What do you call wrong? You have been tied to that woman's skirts these five months; lavishing your money and your time upon her; and leaving your wife alone to die. If that's not wrong, I should like to know what is."

He made no reply; almost too confounded to do it.

"I don't blame you, Robert Lake, as much as I blame them," she took occasion to say as they were parting. "You are a vain, thoughtless, empty-headed fellow, made so, I believe, by your enforced idleness; and they, those two women, are old and crafty. Mrs. Chester was serving her self-interest; the other her unjustifiable woman's vanity. You yielded yourself a willing prisoner to the birdlime spread under your feet, and now your folly has come home with interest. *I* saw your wife was dying of the pain, if you did not."

Without another word, whether of adieu or apology, she brushed past him up the street; and Mr. Lake turned to his home, something like a beaten dog that dare not lift its tail from between its legs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DREAM WORKED OUT.

Mrs. Lake was better. The bleeding was stopped, the doctor gone, and she seemed comfortable. There was less danger than Miss Jupp had supposed, for the blood-vessel which had broken proved to be only a small one on the chest—not the lungs. To her husband it appeared incomprehensible that she should be in any danger at all: his mind had never admitted the possibility of it.

He was all alive to it now. As long as she lay in bed he scarcely left her chamber. To talk with her much was not allowed, but he sat there, holding her hand, looking into her eyes with the old love in his. What his reflections were, or how great his self-reproaches, was best known to himself. When these men, essentially kind and tender by nature, have to indulge in such remorse, be assured it is not very light.

He could not bring himself to believe that any conduct of his had contributed to his wife's illness; still less that he had caused it. That was a flight of fancy not easy to him to understand; but he saw now how ill she must have been all along, and bitterly regretted that he had left her so much alone. Rather than have *wilfully* ill-treated her, he would have forfeited his life. His love had come back to him, now that it was too late—it may be more appropriate to say his senses had come back to him.

In a day or two she grew so much better that she was allowed to leave her bed for a small sitting-room on the same floor, carried into it by him. Late in the afternoon, he left her comfortably lying back in the easy chair, and inclined to sleep. Taking his hat, he walked out.

His errand was to the doctor. His wife seemed to assume that she should not recover; Miss Jupp and the servants the same; for all he saw, she might be well in a week or two: and he went to put the question. Dr. Marlow had said nothing particular to him of her state, one way or the other, and he could not question him before his wife.

Dr. Marlow was at home, and came to him at

once. The two families had been very intimate; on familiar terms one with the other. Mr. Lake plunged into the matter at once, speaking of the danger other people seemed to apprehend, and of his own inability to see it.

"Is she, or is she not, in peril?" he asked. "Tell me the plain truth."

The old man laid his hand upon the speaker's shoulder. "What if the truth should be painful? Will you hear it—the whole of it?"

"I am come to hear it."

"Then I can only tell you that she is in danger; and I fear that a little time will see the end."

Very rapidly beat his pulses as he listened. Repentant pulses. A whole lifetime of repentance seemed, in that moment, to be in every one of them.

"But what is killing her? What is it?"

"The primary cause is of course that cold she caught at Guild. It laid hold of her system. Still, I think she might have rallied: many a time, since she came home, I have deemed her all but well again. You ought to know best, Master Robert, but to me it appears as though she had some grievance on her mind, and that it

has been working mischief. I hope you have been a good husband to her, as Joan says to Hodge," added the doctor, turning from Mr. Lake to take a pinch of snuff. "Your wife has possessed one of those highly sensitive, rarely-refined temperaments, that, when joined to a fragile body, an unkind blow would shatter. I once told you this."

He made no comment; he was battling with his pain. Dr. Marlow continued.

"The body was a healthy body; there was no inherent disease, as I have always believed, and I cannot see why it should not have recovered; but the mind seemed to pull it back; two powers, one working against the other. Between them they have conquered, and will lay her low."

"Do you call it consumption?" Mr. Lake jerked out. And really the words were jerked out, rather than fairly spoken.

"Decidedly not. More of a decline: a waste of the system."

"Those declines are cured sometimes."

"Not often: when they fairly set in."

"Oh, doctor," he cried, clasping the old man's hand, and giving vent to some of the anguish that was rending him, "try and save

her! Save her for my sake! You don't know the cause I have to ask it."

"I wish I could—for both your sakes. She is beyond earthly aid."

They stood looking at each other. Dr. Marlow, willing if possible to soothe in a degree the blow, resumed.

"I suppose I must, after all, have been mistaken in her constitution. When consumption showed itself in her brother, and he died of it, I watched her all the closer. But I could detect nothing wrong: though she was always one of those blossoms that a sharp wind would blow away. The disease was there, we must assume, and I failed to detect it."

"You say—you said but now—that it is not consumption," returned Mr. Lake, speaking sharply in his pain.

"Neither is it. But when unsoundness is inherent in the constitution it does not always show itself in the same form. Sometimes it comes out in one shape, sometimes in another."

There was no more to be said; nothing further to be learnt. Mr. Lake returned home with his burden of knowledge, wondering how much of this dread fiat Clara suspected, how much not.

The shades of evening were on the room when he entered it, imparting to it a semi-gloom, but the rays of the fire-light fell on his wife's wasted face. Stirring the coals into a bright blaze, he sat down by her chair, and took her hand. Her wasted fingers entwined themselves fondly with his.

"I know where you have been, Robert. And I guess for what purpose."

"Ah. You are wise, my little wife. I went out to get a breath of fresh air."

"You have been to Dr. Marlow's. Margaret Jupp called, and she said she saw you turn into his house. You went to ask him whether I should get well. He told you No: for he knows I shall not. Was it not so?"

She leaned a little forward to look at him. He suddenly clasped her to his breast with a gush of passionate tenderness, and his hot tears fell upon her face.

"Oh, my darling! my darling!"

"It must be," she softly whispered. "There is no appeal against it now."

"Clara, if we are indeed to part, at least let perfect confidence be restored between us," he resumed, controlling his emotion with an effort.

"What is the trouble that has been upon you?"

"The trouble?"

"Some of them are hinting at such a thing," he said, thinking of the doctor and of Miss Jupp. "I must know from you what it is."

"Need you ask?"

"Yes. For I cannot comprehend it. My darling, you must tell me."

"If *she* had never come between us, I do not think I should have been ill now."

"I *cannot* understand it," he repeated, a wailing sound in his emphasized words. "I have been foolish, thoughtless, wrong: though not to the extent you may possibly have imagined. But surely, taking it at its worst, *that* was not cause sufficient to bring you to death."

"Your love left me for another. It seemed to me—it seemed to me—more than I could bear."

Partly from the agitation the topic called up, partly that she was in hesitation how to frame her words, the pauses came. It was as if she would fain have said more.

"My love? oh no. It was but a passing——" the word at his tongue's end was "fancy," but he substituted another—"folly. Clara! do not

give me more than my share of blame; that will be heavy enough, Heaven knows. The old man says that the violent cold you caught at Guild, was the primary cause of decay: surely that cannot be charged upon me."

She was silent a few moments—but, as he had said, there ought to be full confidence between them now—and she had been longing to tell him the whole unreserved truth; a longing that had grown into a sick yearning.

"I will tell you now how I caught that cold. Do you remember the night?"

"Not particularly." He was of a forgetful nature, and the events of the night had only been those of many another.

"*Don't* you remember it? When you were walking with—her—in the shrubbery in the raw twilight——"

Mr. Lake slightly shook his head in the pause she made. Twilight shrubbery walks were lying in numbers on his conscience.

"She complained of cold, and you went to get her shawl out of the summer-house, leaving her seated on the bench in front of the green alcove. She sang a song to herself: I think I could repeat its words now. You brought the

shawl and folded it lovingly around her, and kissed her afterwards, and called her——"

In great astonishment he raised his wife's face to gaze into it. Where had she learnt that little episode? Had she dreamt it? He did not ask: he only stared at her.

She bent down her head again to its resting-place, and folded her arm round him in token of forgiveness. "And called her '*My dearest.*' I was standing there, Robert, behind the bench. I saw and heard all."

Not a word spoke he. He hardly dared to accept the loving sign of pardon, or to press her to him. Had she glanced up she would have seen his face in a hot glow. These little private episodes may be very gratifying in the passing, but it is uncommonly disagreeable to find out that your wife has made a third at them.

"It was very thoughtless of me to run out from the heated room on that cold damp night without anything on," she resumed hastily, as if conscious of the feeling and wishing to cover it. "But oh! I was so unhappy—scarcely, I think, in my senses. I thought you had not returned from Guild: Fanny came in and said you had been home a long while and were with *her*. An

impulse took me that I would go and see: I never did such a thing in my life; never, never, before or since: and I opened the glass doors and went out. I was half way down the shrubbery when I heard you coming into it from a cross walk, and I darted into the green alcove, and stood back to hide myself; not to spy upon you."

She paused, but was not interrupted. Mrs. Lake began to hurry over her tale.

"So you see that, in a measure, she was the cause of the cold which struck to me. And then I was laid up; and many a time when you deemed I should fancy you were out shooting, or had gone to Guild, or something or other, you were with her. I knew it all. And since we came home, you have been ever restless to go to her—leaving me alone—even on Christmas-day."

Ay: even on Christmas-day. He almost gnashed his teeth, in his self-condemnation. She, with her impassioned and entire love for him, with her rare and peculiar temperament that, as the doctor had observed, a rude blow would destroy! The misery of mind reacting upon a wasted frame! He no longer wondered why she was dying.

"Why could you not speak out and tell me this?"

"But that the world seems to have nearly passed away from me, and that earthly passions—pride, self-reticence, shame, I mean the shame of betraying one's dearest feelings, are over—I could not tell you now."

"But don't you see the bed of remorse you have made for me? Had I suspected the one quarter of what you tell me you felt, the woman might have gone to the uttermost ends of the earth, for me. I wish you had spoken."

"It might not have prevented it. My belief is that it would not. It was to be."

Mr. Lake looked at her.

"You remember the dream: how it shadowed forth that I was to meet, in some way, my death through going to Mrs. Chester's."

"Child! Can you still dwell upon that dream?"

"Yes. And so will you when the hearse comes here to take me away. Never was a dream more completely worked out. Not quite yet: it will be shortly. I have something else to tell you; about it and her."

Mr. Lake passed his hand across his brow.

It seemed to him that he had heard enough already.

"The very first moment, when I met Lady Ellis at your sister's, her eyes puzzled me: those strange, jet-black eyes. I could not think where I had seen them. They seemed to be familiar to my memory, and I thought and thought in vain, even when the weeks went on. On this same night that we are speaking of, I alarmed you by my looks. Mrs. Chester happened to look at me as I sat by the fire; she called out; and you, who were at chess with—with her, came up. You all came round me. I was shaking, and my cheeks were scarlet, somebody exclaimed: I believe you thought I was seized with an ague fit. Robert, I was shaking with fear, with undefined dread: for an instant before, as I sat looking at her eyes, it flashed into my mind whose eyes they were."

"Well, whose?" he asked, for she paused.

"They were those of the man who drove the hearse in my dream," she whispered in an awe-struck tone. "The very same. You must recollect my describing them to you when I awoke: 'strangely black eyes, the blackest eyes I ever saw,' though of his face I retained no impres-

sion. It was singular it should have struck upon me then, when I had been for weeks trying unsuccessfully to get the thread of the mystery."

"Oh Clara, my darling, these superstitious feelings are very sad!" he remonstrated. "You ought not to indulge them."

"Will you tell me how I could have avoided them? It was not my fault that the dream came to me: or that the eyes of the driver were *her* eyes: or that my death had been induced through going to Mrs. Chester's. Both you and Mrs. Chester seemed to help me on to it in my dream: and as surely as the man appeared to drive me to the grave in the hearse, so has *she* driven me to it in reality. I wrote out the dream in full at the time, and you will find the paper in my desk. Read it over when I am gone, and reflect how completely it has been fulfilled."

He was silent. A nasty feeling of superstition was beginning to creep over himself.

"Will you let me ask you something?" she whispered, presently.

He bent his tearful face down upon hers. "Ask me anything."

"When—I—am—no longer here, shall you marry her?"

Robert Lake darted up with a tremendous word, almost flinging his wife's face from him. His anger bubbled over for a few moments: not at his wife's question, but at the idea it suggested. For remorse was very strong upon him then; the image of Lady Ellis in consequence distasteful.

"Marry *her!* Her! I would rather take a pistol, and shoot myself through the heart—and —sin that it implies—I assert it before my Maker."

Clara gave utterance to a faint sigh of relief, and unclasped her arms. "Then you do not love her as you have loved me?"

He flung himself on his knees before her, and sobbed aloud in his repentant anguish. She leaned over him endearingly, stroking his face and his hair.

"I only wanted to know that. The misery is over now, darling. For the little while we have to be together, let us be as happy as we used to be."

Emotion shook him to the very centre as he listened. Scarcely twice in a lifetime can a man give way to such. For the little while they had to be together! Ay. As Mary Jupp had said,

he could not recal her back to life: he could not keep her here to make reparation.

Mrs. Lake lay back in her chair exhausted. Her husband stood by the mantelpiece gazing at her with his yearning eyes, hot and feverish after their tears. Silence had succeeded to the interview of agitation: these strong emotional storms always bring their reaction.

A knock at the room door, followed by the entrance of Elizabeth. She came to say that Mrs. Chester was below, asking if she might come up. A moment's pause, and Mrs. Lake answered "yes." The impulse to deny it had been upon her, but she wished to be at peace with all the world. Mr. Lake, less forgiving than his wife, did not care to meet Mrs. Chester, and quitted the room to avoid her. In his propensity to blame somebody else for the past as well as himself, he felt very much inclined to curse Mrs. Chester.

But she had been very quick, and encountered him outside the door, inquiring after his wife in a whisper. Mr. Lake muttered some unintelligible answer, and passed on.

"There's a friend in the drawing-room waiting to see you, Robert," she called after him.

Now, strange though it may seem, the thought of who the "friend" really was, did not occur to Mr. Lake. After the explosion on Christmas-day, brought about by Miss Jupp, he had never supposed that Lady Ellis would show herself at his house. He went downstairs mechanically, expecting to see nobody in particular; some acquaintance might have called. In another moment he stood face to face with her—Angeline Ellis. The exceeding unfitness of her visit, the bad taste which it displayed after that public explosion, struck him with dismay. Perhaps the recent explanation with his wife, their reconciliation, and his own bitter repentance helped the feeling. He bit his angry lips.

She extended to him her delicately-gloved hand, lavender, sewn with black, and melted into her sweetest smile. But the smiles had lost their power. He glanced at her coal-black eyes, as they flashed in the rays of the lamp, remembered the eyes of his wife's dream, and—shuddered.

"You have become a stranger to Guild," she said. "Has that mad woman, Mary Jupp, persuaded you that you will be poisoned if you come?"

He did not choose to see her proffered hand. "I can no longer spare time from my wife, Lady Ellis: I have spared too much from her."

The resentful tone struck her with wonder; the cold manner chilled her unpleasantly: but she smiled yet.

"Is it really true that your wife is so very ill?" she asked. "The maid says so. We had news that she was better, recovering fast; and of course treated Miss Jupp's assertion for what it was worth—as we did the rest she said."

Had he been covered with quills like a porcupine every one of them would have bristled up on end in defence of his wife. Surely her ladyship should have exercised better judgment an' she wished to win him back to her.

Never again! Never again!

"She is dying," he hoarsely answered; "dying through our folly. I beg your pardon, my lady," he added, speaking the two last words in, as it struck her, the refinement of mockery, "it had been better perhaps that I had said *my* folly."

"Folly? Oh!"

"It has been a folly that will entail upon me a lifetime of repentance. Were my whole days to be spent in striving to work it off, as we work

off a debt, they could not make atonement. There are follies that leave their results behind them—a heavy burthen to be borne afterwards throughout life. Take a seat, I beg, while you wait for Mrs. Chester."

He quitted the room; and she compressed her thin lips, which had turned white, for she fully understood him to imply that he had quitted herself and the "folly" for ever. Rarely had her ears heard such truths spoken, and they set on to glow with resentment. She saw Mr. Lake walk out at the garden gate and up the road, all to avoid her. Why? She had committed no wrong—as she counted wrong, as the world counts it: never a woman less likely to commit that than Lady Ellis. She had but amused herself, and he the same; and she really could not understand why Mrs. Lake should make a fuss over it.

Mrs. Chester, meanwhile, seated with Clara, was in her most amiable mood. That the episode of Christmas-day had taken her aback far more than it had taken Lady Ellis, was indisputable; but she was one of those easy-going women who never retain unpleasant impressions long. Besides, she had her way to make in the world.

Before Mr. Lake had left her house many minutes, Miss Jupp in his wake, she had recovered her equanimity, and was laughing over the matter with my lady, assuring her that Mary Jupp was taken with these fits sometimes, and tried to set the world to-rights—the result of bile. Anything rather than that Lady Ellis should quit her now, in the depth of winter. They had come over to-day, my lady fully understanding and tacitly falling into her plans, hoping to patch up a reconciliation. He was but a light-headed fellow at best—turned about any way, as the wind turns a feather, mentally argued Mrs. Chester; and he was safe not to have said anything to his wife.

"You are looking so very much better than I expected, dear Clara. All you want is complete rest, with good nursing; as I remarked to Anna Chester the day after Christmas-day, when she came over to inquire about you. I was glad you saw her. I couldn't come myself—I had one of my wretched sick-headaches."

She spoke quickly, running one sentence into another. Clara sat back in her chair, meek, quiet, calm, a smile of peace upon her face.

"I should not have asked your husband to

dine with us that day without you," spoke Mrs. Chester, deliberating how to heal breaches—"we should never have cared to see him at any time unaccompanied by you, but that you were not able to come."

Mrs. Lake made no reply.

"Clara, I must speak out. There's poor Lady Ellis downstairs wanting to see you. She says she has talked and laughed with Mr. Lake, and is terribly afraid now that you might not have liked it. She meant nothing. He is ten years younger than she is. Goodness me, child! you could never have thought ill of it. Surely you will see her?"

"I could not talk with her about—about the past," murmured poor Clara, the hectic cheeks becoming crimson.

"Good gracious me! who said anything of talking about it with her?" exclaimed Mrs. Chester. "My dear Clara, she'd not speak of it for the world. She has not spoken of it to me; but I can see what she feels. She's so afraid you should reproach her in your heart; she would so like to be reconciled in spirit. Oh! my dear, there's nothing like peace."

With the peace on her own spirit; with the

fresh love of her husband in her heart; with the consciousness that she should soon be with Him who has enjoined love and peace on earth if we would inherit Heaven, Clara did not hesitate. Lady Ellis could do her no harm with her husband now: and a sudden wish for at least a tacit proof of the full forgiveness she accorded, arose within her. But she did not speak immediately; and Mrs. Chester was impatient.

"You would not bear malice, Clara?"

"I will see Lady Ellis. As to bearing malice, if you only knew how different it is! All that kind of feeling has passed away from me. I wish you would note what I say now, Mrs. Chester, and—and repeat it, should you think it might be acceptable after I am dead. Should anybody in the world have injured me, intentionally or unintentionally, I give them my free and full forgiveness, as I hope to be myself forgiven. I trust we shall meet in Heaven; you, and I, and Lady Ellis, and all the world, and live together in happy bliss for ever. There's a great joy upon me when I say this."

The words were a little different from any anticipated by Mrs. Chester. She rubbed her

face with her handkerchief and stared; and her tone, as she rejoined, partook in a degree of the solemnity of that other one.

"After you are dead, Clara! You are not surely going to die?"

Mrs. Lake did not answer in words. She looked full at Mrs. Chester with her clear brown eyes, and the wan face from which the hectic was fading.

"Good patience me!" thought that lady, "I hope I shan't dream of her as she looks now."

Elizabeth entered with a cup of tea on a waiter.

"Here comes my tea," said Clara. "Would you like some?"

"Indeed I should: my mouth is quite parched. And poor Lady Ellis? You will let her drink one, too, here with us, Clara? It will be the seal of peace."

"Bring two cups of tea and some bread and butter," said Clara to the maid in a low tone. Certainly she had not intended to invite the lady down stairs to tea with her; but Mrs. Chester had put it in a point of view scarcely rejectable.

Now Mrs. Chester, crafty and clever, had

been drawing largely upon her own active imagination. It had never occurred to Lady Ellis to wish for the kiss of peace, or for any token of reconciliation whatsoever. Therefore when Mrs. Chester brought her up and introduced her to the room, the two—her ladyship and the dying woman—were inwardly at cross purposes.

Nothing of which was betrayed, or likely to be. Lady Ellis's delicately-gloved hand met that attenuated one in a moment's greeting, and she sat down with calm composure. A few remarks passed upon indifferent topics between the three, and Elizabeth came in with the tea. The next moment another visitor appeared on the scene—Mary Jupp, shown in by Mr. Lake. To describe their faces of astonishment at seeing the ladies there, would take the pen of a great artist in words. Not seeing Lady Ellis downstairs, he thought they had left. Miss Jupp stood with a stony stare; and her companion bit his annoyed lips.

"Come in, Mary; come in."

Mrs. Lake's invitation bore a hurried pleading sound to Miss Jupp's ear, as if she had been uneasy in her company, and welcomed the relief. But for that, the strong-minded lady had turned

away again without leaving behind her so much as a word. She came forward and sat down.

"Elizabeth shall bring you some tea."

"Tea for me!" cried Miss Jupp, bluntly. "I couldn't drink a drop. It would choke me."

"Is your throat bad, Mary Jupp?" asked Mrs. Chester.

"No; only my temper."

A frightened look in Clara's eyes, a pleading gaze that went right into Mary Jupp's. The young lady, doing violence to her inclinations, shut up her mouth resolutely, and folded her hands upon her lap, and spoke not another word, good, bad, or indifferent.

The curious meeting came to an end, brought to a summary close by Mrs. Chester. That lady, not altogether liking the aspect of affairs, and privately wishing Miss Jupp at the antipodes, thought it good to take herself away, and leave, so to say, well alone. Lady Ellis and Clara Lake shook hands for the last time in life.

"I wish you well," Clara whispered.

"Thanks," airily answered my lady.

Mr. Lake, in the very commonest politeness, went down with them. As they stood in the

garden Mrs. Chester went back to get her muff, and they waited for her.

"Are you reconciled to me, Mr. Lake?" asked Lady Ellis.

"I wish to beg your pardon for aught I may have said that was unwarrantable," he rejoined. "I had no right to reproach you when the fault of the past was mine."

Mrs. Chester came forth, and he held the gate open for them. But my lady noticed that he did not choose to see her hand when she held it out.

My lady gave a little toss to her head. If this was to be the end of platonic friendships, keep her from them in future.

And Robert Lake, a whole world of self-condemning bitterness in his face, leaned on the gate, and looked after them.

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